ノーゲーム・ノーライフ 4

NO GAME NO LIFE

ゲーマー兄妹はリアル恋愛ゲームから逃げ出しました

著／イラスト●榎宮祐

MF文庫J

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4

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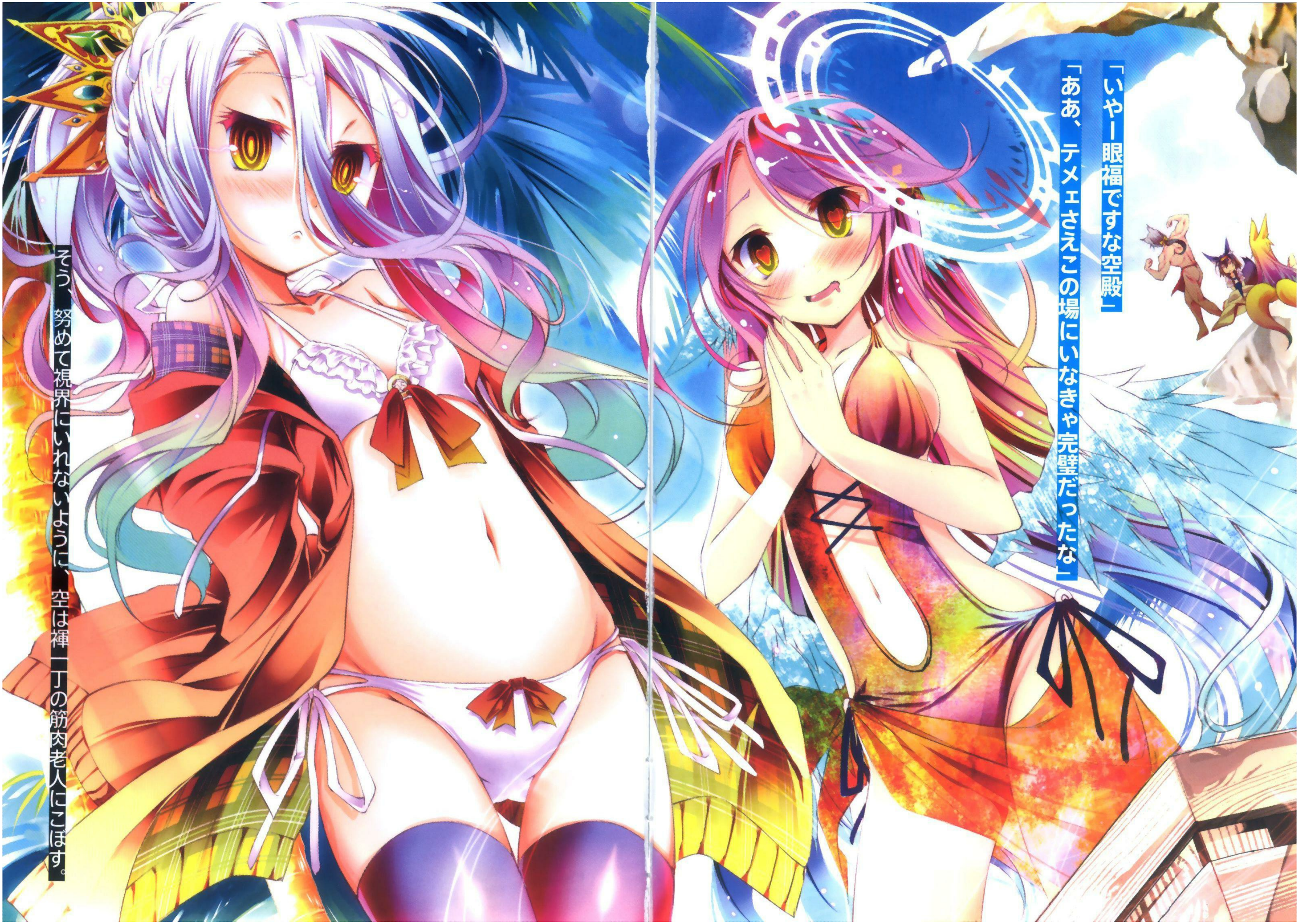
著／イラスト◉榎宮祐

ど〜も〜ウフフ☆　女王（じょおー）さま代理のアミラちゃんだよ〜？
う〜オールオッケー☆
ボク『プラム』と言いますぅ、お祭しの通り吸血種ですぅ



「いやー眼福ですな空殿」

「ああ、テメェさえこの場にいなきゃ完璧だったな」

そう、努めて視界にいれないように、空は褌一丁の筋肉老人にこぼす。

1日目
白
「……男装の……
隠し攻略キャラ……鉄板……」
ステフ
「なんで私だけ、ソラや
いのさんと同じ——
男性服なんですの？」
TAIL
LOAD
SAVE
LOAD
LOG

十の盟約

唯一神の座を手にした神、テトが作ったこの世界の絶対法則。
知性ある【十六種族（イクシード）】に対し一切の戦争を禁じた盟約——即ち。

【一つ】この世界におけるあらゆる殺傷、戦争、略奪を禁ずる

【二つ】争いは全てゲームによる勝敗で解決するものとする

【三つ】ゲームには、相互が対等と判断したものを賭けて行われる

【四つ】〝三〟に反しない限り、ゲーム内容、賭けるものは一切を問わない

【五つ】ゲーム内容は、挑まれたほうが決定権を有する

【六つ】〝盟約に誓って〟行われた賭けは、絶対遵守される

【七つ】集団における争いは、全権代理者をたてるものとする

【八つ】ゲーム中の不正発覚は、敗北と見なす

【九つ】以上をもって神の名のもと絶対不変のルールとする

【十】みんななかよくプレイしましょう

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Preface

It was farther than the sea...

So far that it had become unreachable, a part of «fairy tales»—

In a certain place there existed a beautiful princess.

She had beautiful golden hair that even the moon would admire.

Her shining eyes could overshadow stars.

Even the birds would be humbled by her amazing voice.

The fame of her beauty had spread across the seven continents.

Men from all over the world kept coming to propose to the princess.

The princess said:

"Whoever can give me the best present in the world—I shall give my love to him."

Thus many a man came to propose with dazzling treasures.

Needless to say that there were gold and jewels.

The princess even received hundreds of territories, thousands of castles, and tens of thousands of slaves.

But the princess wasn't even one bit satisfied.

"I want things that are more beautiful, more valuable."

So there were more men who sent unique treasures to her.

Not to mention unique vows of love in the world.

The princess even received secret treasures unique in the world, heavenly objects that didn't even have another among gods.

But the princess was still not satisfied.

No matter what degree the beauty, they could not rival the princess' beauty.

No matter what degree the love, they were like granted to the princess.

No matter what degree the treasure, the princess had already gotten them.

—There were no more treasures in the world that could amaze the princess.

Even so, the princess still said:

"Someone come—is there a treasure that's even more amazing?"

—Things went like this until one day.

A prince came before the princess.

He was different from any man the princess had ever met.

He was young and strong, but dressed poorly.

Didn't seem like he was carrying any treasure too.

But the prince gave a "little treasure", and said:

"I am going to give the princess a treasure that she has absolutely never seen before."

Upon seeing what the prince gave—the most beautiful treasure in the world.

The princess could not stop being amazed...

And thus she gave her promise of love to the prince.

And that treasure was——

......

"—That's it! It was 'true love'!"

«She» closed the book in her hands, and screamed.

In this manner, «she», in order to look for her 'true love', entered a long, long sleep.

Waiting for the day that the man with that 'little treasure' in the fairy tale would appear.

—Without any consideration for any possible consequences that might be brought by her actions.

...What «she» had read was really a «fairy tale».

But the story of «her» falling into a deep sleep for the fairy tale, isn't a «fairy tale».

That's farther than the sea, so far it was 800 years ago—

So silly that any of the Exceed would be laughed at for this—**'history'**.

Prologue - Easy Start

Part 1

The Werebeasts’ nation — the Eastern Union. The countryside of Kannagari City.

There is a building where the former Eastern Union’s ambassador resides — Hatsune Izuna’s mansion.

In a wooden room which has architecture resembling a Chashitsu[1], the smell of incense drifted over the newly laid tatami mats.

The room was so silent, one would think that only unmoving plants were present within. A single silhouette was seen shivering inside.

“……Shiro, are you awake?”

The figure quietly climbed out of his bed, and whispered to his side.

……No reply.

Only her smooth and steady breathing could be heard next to him.

Confirming what he heard, the figure nodded his head, and snuck into action.

Despite being in a rush, he was holding his breath, while holding tightly onto his pillow and not making any sounds.

Then, his hand grabbed the item he had targeted, and at once, he quietly moved to the corner of the room.

“Nobody on the right, nobody on the left. Other than Shiro, no one else is present.”

The figure recited these words, and begun his operation. His face began to emerge through the darkness.

It was a black-eyed and black-haired teenager, who had dark circles under his eyes which decreased his attractiveness greatly.

He was Sora, 18 years old, and Imanity’s latest King. He was one of the two rulers of Elchea.

The king carefully investigated his surroundings. He used his left hand to hold his tablet PC and his right hand to hold a box of facial tissues. He began his declaration as softly as possible.

“Now is the time — I can discharge the long accumulated toxins in my body!”

— Truly a pervert.

If the citizens were to witness their 『King』 in his current manner, they would probably sorrowfully cry out with a long “Oh……”

But, please first wait a while.

It has been two months since he and his sister had been summoned to this foreign world named Disboard, a world where everything was decided by games.

In that short period of time, not only had he ascended the throne of the Imanity who were on the verge of destruction, together with his sister, he had went through several death matches — subduing those with the ability to use magic, surpassing various cheats, and recapturing the territory of the Imanity. Today, they merged their country with so many lands that they have become the third largest country in the world.

Sora — during these series of fierce battles with countless women — not limiting to the Imanity, but also including the Flügel, Elves, and Werebeasts —there had been several times where people were practically naked, be it in games or during baths. During all these times, he was forced to turn his head away. He was like a man playing in a sandbox. Within his tablet PC and smartphones was the residue of these paradises in the form of videos he had recorded. However, as he is always by his sister’s side, he had never once had a chance to view these…

So it is to say…

He was never able to vent his urges —!

For a man in such a situation, would accusing him of being a pervert be reasonable?

— Ahh, that’s right. Women, you can despise me for all you want.

But fellow men, you should be able to relate to this!

For an eighteen year old virgin to endure to this very day, just think of his iron willpower! How can it not bring you to tears?!

That should be awe-inspiring enough, no?

That should be enough to call it — 『Love』, no?

I need not speak for my sister who is still so young.

In order to protect the several maidens around him, he had to resist all of his urges —

Such noble ambitions — what would it be if not 『Love』?

……Is there anyone out there who can refute this — No, there is not!

I think there isn't… probably?

“I don’t care if you’re going to scold me as a pervert, I’m already at my limits and on the verge of bursting — No, this is indeed a noble act of the highest order!!”

With such tragic thoughts in his consciousness, Sora… put his hand to his crotch…

“Um, Um… Ex-Excuse me…”

“KYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

Upon hearing that voice behind him, Sora let out a scream like a girl, so scared that he fell on the tatami.

A sigh was let out — there were three people who were responding.

“……Ni……Do it more quietly……”

Getting up and no longer pretending to be asleep, a pure-white haired sister with red eyes coldly stared on at him — Shiro.

“Ugh… there are other people right, des? Izuna wants to sleep together, des.”

Sticking her head out from the side of the ceiling was a black haired Werebeast girl with animal ears — Hatsuse Izuna.

“Who dares to offend my master? Can I cut it off? Can I cut off this thief’s head!?”

Appearing out of thin air with an abstract halo floating on her head was a Flügel girl — Jibril.

The owners of these three voices had an air of discontent around them…

Sora, who had fallen on the tatami, could not resist shouting while he was putting his pants back on.

“Doesn’t this world have any concept of 『privacy』?! I just suffered a serious violation!!”

Then, when he was in the middle of pulling up his zipper…

“Who～～ are you to say that!? How dare you act like a sage while peeping on others!”

While Sora was pointing and shouting in their direction, everyone else had finally realized that something was amiss, and redirected their gazes onto that person.

Only a figure could be seen. The person sat quietly on the floor, as if the person had merged with the night sky.

The room was dark and hazy — but even so, the person gave off an unnatural sense of lacking a shadow.

“Sigh…”

With light illuminating from her finger tips through magic, Jibril unhappily tilted her lips to the side.

“I was wondering who was capable of approaching master this closely while avoiding my notice — a Dhampir, I see.”

“Dh-Dhampir?”

Upon hearing Jibril’s words, everyone looked towards that figure once more.

Through the illumination of light, a girl wearing a black dress emerged. It was as if she was wearing the night sky on her body.

She had short blue hair, and her glowing purple pupils shone brightly through. Her teeth were white, and on her back were small bat-like wings.

Although she looked to be around 15 or 16 in human age, that would not be so since she was a Dhampir.

Her appearance matched Sora and Shiro’s impressions of vampires exactly, as it was completely like what was depicted in a regular vampire story.

— 『Those who transcend death (Nosferatu)』, 『The rulers of the undead (No Life King)』, 『Dominators of the night (Nightwalker)』……

As shown in these countless different names, they were a race that were greatly feared by humans — but, as for this girl’s case……

“…… I, I can’t do this anymore…… Please…… Please save me……”

Her face was haggard and she spoke in a weak voice which completely offset any prior impressions of terror.

“You lot are still the same. Using your illusions to stay hidden — surreptitiously sneaking around to hide from place to place, and using your ability of bright eyes.”

“It’s such a pity…” Jibril then laughed as she sarcastically continued on.

“And I thought your race had finally made good use of your abilities, but you’ve silently died out without a sound. Such a sorry state you’re in.”

“J-Jibril… you’re still speaking as sharply as ever.”

Even Sora could not help but find it terrible while he watched her scold the dying girl.

However, Izuna lightly jumped down from the ceiling without making a sound, and tilted her head while showing a puzzled expression.

“Izuna heard from grandpa, that the Dhampirs had already died on the roadside, des.”

“…Eh?”

So Jibril’s bitter words were actually the blatant, unsparing truth.

But Izuna was merely using the wrong choice of words. She meant no ill will.

So that means… the race was supposed to have already perished…?

“…… the Exceed’s…… twelfth ranked race…… the 『Dhampirs』……”

Seeing Sora was at a loss, Shiro stepped in to help.

She crawled out of bed, and began reading out the information she memorized.

“……The race that…… sucks on the blood of the rest of the Exceed — for their souls…… to continue living.”

Shiro continued to speak.

“And with…… the 『Ten Oaths』……”

Shiro let out an exclamation and her mouth twitched slightly.

— 『Ten Oaths』.

That was what the sole god had set, and these oaths were to be absolutely obeyed in this world of Disboard.

One of which stated “All murder, war and robbery is forbidden in this world.”

If these were the vampires that Sora was familiar with, that would mean that under these oaths…

Attacking others or biting them… would inflict harm on the other party, and thus a race that needs to win in order to suck others’ blood would…

“Eh? Is that so? So that means the Dhampirs… would not be able to suck blood without the other party’s consent, right?”

The dying girl did not even need to speak for Sora to know the answer.

…From this, Sora could understand why her face was so haggard. Jibril then nodded and spoke.

“To add on to what master has said, if a Dhampir sucks the blood of another…”

“They would turn into a Dhampir… Nothing unusual there.”

As a result, unless the other party wanted to become a Dhampir, it would be impossible to obtain consent to suck anyone’s blood…

“……Huh? No, that isn’t the case.”

“Eh? That’s weird. It doesn’t always turn out like that?”

“Dhampirs obtain 『soul essence』 from blood and body fluids, and when drawing these fluids, their own soul would be mixed with the other’s. That would promote a Dhampir’s growth and enhance their strength, while the one who gets bitten will have a mixed soul and catch a specific disease.”

So that means…

Jibril smiled and asserted, “It typically does a hundred times more harm than it does any good.”

“……How can there be such hopeless vampires.”

— 『Let me offer to you the power to be ageless and the strength of the night. 』

Being unable to use this as a slogan to persuade others, they were just a race that would bring about illnesses.

Hearing their helpless situation would make one weep. Sora turned to face the Dhampir girl, and sighed with nothing to say.

I see… It’s not surprising that they would go extinct with the implementation of the Ten Oaths.

But then… if that is so… Sora felt rather confused.

……Why haven’t they gone extinct yet?

“Pl…… Please …… I, I’m at the brink of dying…… give me your 『soul essence』 ……”

The girl was practically begging. With disorderly breaths and a weak voice, she sought the help of Sora who was currently in deep thought.

As she spoke, her voice got more hoarse and weak. She was basically about to die if……

“……No, after hearing that you’d catch some disease after sharing their soul, only ghosts would agree to that. Are you an idiot? Just die already.”

He said that but… his conscience was not prepared to watch her die in front of his eyes.

Sora was trying to find a way to save her but…

As he would become a sick virgin, it was particularly difficult for him to promise her. Sora scratched at his head in great annoyance. Then, all of a sudden…

“Ah! Master, I didn’t make myself clear. As long as you don’t get bitten, you will not get the disease.”

……Ehh?

“Although without biting, Dhampirs would not be able to grow from their soul essence without using their teeth to suck the blood. However, if it is just to sustain their life… 『direct oral administration』 of the body fluids would suffice for emergency situations.”

“……You mean?”

“Second to blood, the body fluid where the 『soul essence』 is most highly concentrated in, and not biting to ingest the fluids, that would be the…”

……When he heard what Jibril was about to say next, Sora’s next action was……

“Semen…”

“Miss, are you alright!? I’ll save you right now!! I definitely won’t let you die!!”

Everyone present at the scene was stunned… — not to mention Shiro.

Even the vision of the Werebeasts or the Flügel could only catch his after-image.

— His attitude changed so quickly that even a blink of an eye would suffice at describing his speed.

Sora carried the Dhampir girl to the corner of the room, and carefully laid her down there……

He nodded his head in deep acknowledgement.

“Now I see, you aren’t vampires, you are succubi!”

That’s why they haven’t gone extinct.

Who would let such a wonderful race go extinct —!

Sora cried out in his heart, and prepared to undo the buttons of his trousers, but then……

“……What is semen, des?

“…… Ni…… M18 scene…… NG……”

The two children under 18 years old looked towards him, and that would mean……

— The 『heart-pounding scene』 had just been force closed.

“…… Ah, not this again.”

Sora looked up to the sky with hope in his eyes, with tears almost about to fall.

Eighteen-year-old virgin Sora, don’t tell me you’re going to do as usual and not move any ground forward?

Having to turn my back countless times on these otherworldly paradises, back to being a man playing in a sandbox…… Don’t tell me it’s really going to stay like this forever?

(…… No, it can’t!!)

Sora bit his lip tightly.

Whatever the case, you must use this brain of yours to get out of all kinds of difficulties for your survival!

The moment that I must concentrate all my brain juices to cross over a heavy obstacle — isn’t that time upon me right now?!

— After this thought, he recollected on the events that had happened.

His sister looked on with resolute and cold eyes.

“…… Shiro, please imagine a fully-clothed man drowning in a river.”

“…… Un.”

“Implementing the appropriate CPR, and removing the wet clothes that would drop his body temperature to a fatal degree, and giving that person your body heat…… would that be rated M18?”

“……………… It wouldn’t……”

“Right. And why’s that so? Because that is helping another, and saving that person’s life. It’s the most noble of actions!!”

Sora nodded exaggeratedly in agreement with what he had just said, and with very sincerely clear eyes, he looked to the girl lying at the corner of the room — She seemed so haggard and weak that no words could properly describe how she looked.

“Indeed, for us humans, it can easily be deemed as irrational, but this is to save a life… it’s a noble act! Therefore, your brother is forced to abandon his shame, and entrust my entire self to the cultures of other races in order to save her life!! And so, can you please turn around and avert your eyes ~ ~ !?"

— The most perfect and flawless reasoning has been stated!

— That is, I am starting a rebellion!

"…… since it's body fluids …… then 『saliva』 would also work……?"

Shiro gently worded her speech, which immediately let his perfect reasoning (laughs) end its life in less than a second. Sora could not help but freeze in his place.

Jibril thought for a moment, and smiled with compassion towards the pitiful race.

"I think there should be no problems with that. Though there would be less soul essence within, but it should suffice for an emergency situation, I think?"

"…… Un, allow Shiro to……"

In this way, Shiro walked towards the Dhampir girl lying at her brother's feet.

Then, she put her face close to the girl's face ——

"Wa-Wait a second, Shiro! That…… isn't quite right! Nii does not agree to this!"

"…… CPR…… a noble act……"

Sora hurriedly tried to stop her, but Shiro coldly stared as she rebutted him with his own words.

Sora hurriedly used all his functioning brain cells to think of a valid argument, but ——

(—— no, shouldn't a kiss between girls be perfectly fine?)

It is not M18, and it is also in a very healthy zone. To top it off, it is a genuine act to save a life.

Incidentally, Sora — in fact had no discrimination towards the yuri genre, but still……

(—— I just never want to see Shiro do such a thing.)

—— And why is that so?

That question came to his mind in a flash, but Sora shook his head straight-away.

"No! A French kiss is not good for a child's education! I veto against this!!"

Sora had yet to think what would happen after his statement, so he hastily looked to his surroundings.

Izuna looked particularly bored, and Shiro still had her eyes half-open, not to mention ——

“Ji-Jibril! Your body fluids ——”

Izuna was still young, and Shiro was a no-go, and it was greatly regrettable that Steph was not present at this moment……

“Under master’s command, I dare not to disobey — even though freely bloodsucking mosquitoes are still above this pathetic race by a few points, but to kiss — though since you wish to save her life, master, I don’t really recommend doing it this way.”

Her chillingly poisonous tongue made even Sora a little scared, but Jibril still continued speaking.

“If I were to give her my body fluids, she would likely evaporate, as the difference in the quality and concentration of our soul essences is too large.”

—High in their position was the mighty sixth ranked race of the Exceed.

This race of Flügel-sama is just so…… hax, totally hax!

“…… then…… let Shiro……”

Shiro used a finger to lift her hair, and inched her face towards the girl ——

“——————Oh, oh right～～! There’s also ‘sweat’, right!!”

Sora’s brain was on the verge of boiling. He spoke the ‘alternative’ he just thought of with no hesitation.

“Sw-Sweat is also considered a body fluid! Right? Jibril!?”

"…… It's hard to say… Sweat contains the most minimal amount of soul essence……"

"N-N-N-No other choice! We've got to at least give it a try!"

Before Sora could leap into action……

Shiro slowly took off her sock, and extended her foot towards the Dhampir girl's eyes.

"……kneel on the floor…… and lick."

Imanity's queen, Shiro.

— She smiled a sadistic smile unfitting of a queen.

"Oh my sister, although I had long realized how you hide away your S tendencies, but for you to do so without any hesitation… your brother does feel rather shocked……"

Sora's cheek twitched, and he dejectedly collapsed onto the ground.

However, at the other side, the Dhampir girl, who looked almost like a corpse, suddenly moved.

She sniffed a few times, and her eyes suddenly widened while she jumped up.

Awaiting the right time to pounce from her position, she popped Shiro's foot into her mouth……

"— This! What is this! What a delicious taste, so delicious!!"

…… Everyone who was watching the scene looked on with a cold gaze, thinking:

— the Exceed's twelfth ranked race, the 『Dhampir』…

Although it was far from the sixth ranked Flügel and the seventh ranked Elves, it was still ranked above the fourteenth ranked Werebeasts.

But, she was kneeling on the floor before a sixteenth ranked girl and —— endlessly praising the taste of her foot.

"Does that sound right……?"

— Indeed, this is not M18.

But yet for some reason, it feels like something is very wrong.

The Dhampir girl looked like she was a character in a comic book, tasting the most gourmet of cuisine along with flowers filling the background as she wildly licked Sora's sister's foot while endlessly praising its taste.

“…… Jibril, are Dhampirs perverts?”

Sora directed his question to Jibril, as if his consciousness had just ascended Mt. Everest.

“Yup…… but since it is master’s soul essence, wouldn’t it naturally be delicious?”

“—Eh? Why?”

“That, of course, is because master is…… tough, strong, and an extremely rare, unique and noble soul that any common person who searches the entire world for such a presence will still never meet.”

Upon hearing Jibril’s comments, Izuna, who was originally forced to watch from the side, vigorously nodded her head in agreement.

“……Sora and Shiro’s soul essence……does not have a contaminated taste. I do not dislike it, des.”

However, Sora responded their remarks with a weary sigh.

“…… Am I becoming delusional? I always get the feeling that people are looping the words ‘stubborn’, ‘only concerned for his own good’, ‘an abruptly changing character’, ‘withdrawn’, and not to mention ‘a virgin’!”

“None of that sort —— doesn’t that just show that you possess 『unknown soul essence』? There is not a thing that can compare to the greatness of that…… honestly speaking, I also want to try a taste of it, fuhuhu～”

“………………Sora, Sora……Can I try a bite, des?”

The two looked up expectantly at Sora at the same time, with a stream of saliva dripping from each of their mouths.

“I say, is there not a normal person in this room?”

“…… is Nii qualified…… to say that?”

—— The person with common sense (Stephanie) who was not present at Izuna’s house, was being quietly ridiculed by Shiro’s words.

———…………

With her strength restoring and her skin starting to become shinier, the Dhampir girl spoke.

“Huu…… It really was very tasty…… thank you for the meal.”

“…… ugggh…… it’s wet…… need to wash it…… uggghh…… baths are so troublesome……”

Compared to the girl with an absent-minded expression on her face and her hands clasped together, Shiro was filled with regret…… but first, leaving that aside…

As he could finally begin to question her, Sora looked toward the girl.

“—— We’ve been at this for so long and we still don’t know who the heck you are?”

“Ah, I was late in introducing myself. My name is Plum, and as you can see, I am a Dhampir.”

Sitting in an upright posture on her knees, the girl — Plum — continued speaking with a stern expression.

“I have something to, ugh…… request of you today.”

She stuttered while taking out a thing that looked like a cheat sheet.

“Ahem!” She cleared her throat.

Then she slowly bent her three fingers as if drawing a bow, and read her script in a clumsy tone.

“P-Please forgive me for my laughable appearance in our first meeting…… the ones who joined with the Flügel and the Eastern Union, Elchea’s king and queen, Your Majesties Sora and Shiro —— please save my race!”

……Having heard her words, Sora seemed to understand everything.

“Aaaahhh, being able to replace blood with semen but requiring the other’s consent to proceed —— and now coming to us for help.”

The conditions to the entire scenario were like that of a fantasy.

—— And so? Is this fantasy upon us now?

Sora immediately gave his judgement, and a hearty smile appeared on his face……

“The conditions are that you have to move to an H-game (somewhere else). Bye. Be careful on your way back.”

“How did this even happen, aaaaahhhhh!? Wait a minute youuuuu!!”

…… Needless to say, the M18 scenario was immediately rejected.

Part 2

—— Long after the inter-racial war.

Sora brought up his grand plan to 『overturn the entire world』.

Within their world were very many races, which held a myriad of problems just from their different histories, ideologies and cultures.

Yet, Sora wanted to break all the boundaries between races. He began to realize how undoubtedly ridiculous his plot was.

And that was to produce 『a single country of many races』.

In a world where everything is decided by games, it is possible to achieve it in theory.

But it is still only a theory at the end of the day.

"…… is it really okay to give it to them?"

As she thought about the two siblings who were planning to bring the races together and obtain all their race pieces in order to challenge the One True God, her mouth slanted to a side.

With that ridiculous dream of obtaining a 『piece』 in mind, would they really be able to escape from this 『chess board』?

Would they really be able to fulfill every one of those conditions……?

The girl who was deep in thought had animal ears of a fox and long hair, as well as two flitting gold tails.

She was the Eastern Union and the Werebeasts' sole representative, 『Miko』.

Within the courtyard of her shrine, she was standing on a small red bridge that was built across a pond. As she looked across the railing to the reflection of the moon on the water, she was engrossed in thought.

There are far too many obstacles.

Breaking the boundaries between races was a difficult situation even when it was just between two races —— the Imanity and the Werebeasts.

Even if all their citizens were from the same race, in order to unite them towards the same goal, it was as impossible as ascending past the stars.

There existed countless werebeast tribes, and they had previously been in civil strife for over thousands of years.

It was 『Miko』, who bet her everything and even forgot her own real name in order to finally unite the entire Eastern Union.

…… But because she had done this, she knew very deeply how long and difficult such a road would be.

In addition, containing sixteen different races within a single country definitely cannot be achieved through normal means.

But if it were possible, then by those two, it would have already been……

"Well whatever, I'll look into it once more… hahaha."

—— In the past, even she had found the dream of uniting the werebeasts to be so ridiculously high and unobtainable, but she still managed to achieve it in the end.

Compared to myself in the past, they might actually be a little more conservative? 『Miko』 deprecated herself in that very thought, while she poured wine into her glass.

"We're playing together peacefully…… are we not?"

Miko recited the 『Ten Oaths』 while taking a sip of her wine.

—— In the past, when she had issued challenges, she had pretty much given up on her dream.

Now 『those two』, who were brimming with confidence, were already speaking of how they would follow-up after their dream had been achieved —— which was an even more distant future than what was impending on them —— but in contrast, she had already given up on this new chapter.

But…

"If they're looking towards God when there are only flowers before them, they are most likely to stumble over a stone on the way."

Anyone can dream big.

But if they wish to talk about their dream, they must be qualified to do so.

When they finally show all the cards in their hand to the public, while displaying that they are fully qualified, and do all this in time……

『Miko』 raised her hand towards the sky, and something began shining in her palm…… The 『race piece of the Werebeasts』 had appeared.

That was what the One True God had allocated when he set the rules of the world.

Along with the implementation of the 『Ten Oaths』, he had given each race a chess piece.

Only the sole representative of each of the Exceed had the power to make it appear. It shone brilliantly, as if it was woven from light itself.

—— She finally realized the true meaning of these pieces.

Miko placed her empty wine cup on the railing of the bridge, and played with the pawn with her fingers. She looked up hopefully towards the sky.

—— In her heart, she looked forward to 『the moment』 that would arrive in the near future.

Chapter 1 - Encounter/lılll ll⊥

Part 1

Kingdom of Elchea.

It was located on the western part of the continent of Andalusia, and the last country of Imanity, who were the sixteenth-ranked of the Exceed.

After their battle with the Eastern Union less than half a month ago, [the king and queen] i.e. Sora and Shiro won their matches and restored their territory to double its previous size.

……Following which, the problems of the country also doubled.

There were two major issues.

The first was the idea of forming a federation with the Eastern Unions that [the king and queen] i.e. Sora and Shiro had proposed.

Establishing a country across the racial barriers was simply unheard of, and thus a huge problem.

Even though they had regained a portion of their territory, Elchea still lacked the technology to properly utilize these lands.

The other problem was that, while the Eastern Union had lost its mainland territories, its national strength still remained one of the top in the world.

…… Their national strength, currency, not to mention social structures, ethnicity and language were totally different, yet they were expected to have equal access to resources.

Since it is such an obviously difficult situation, I believe there isn't any need to further elaborate.

This was the first time in history that Imanity was faced with such an impossible task.

And the second problem was……

"Really……"

Looking at the cards in her hand, the red haired girl breathed a long sigh.

Stephanie Dora.

Usually abbreviated as Steph.

She was a member of the previous royal family —— a girl whose disposition was totally contrasting with what a previous king's granddaughter should be. Even though she was extremely sleep-deprived and severely fatigued, her usually beautiful face …… was now filled with a scowl and she was emitting a dangerous aura.

The reason was the [second problem].

And that was……

"At such an important time, when the heck do those two bastards intend to come back ~ ~!?"

—— King City of Elchea, main conference room.

Her rant resounded through the entire conference room and it shocked everyone present.

"……Dora-kou[2], I understand how you feel… but it isn't very good for a lady to say the word 'bastard', right?"

The one who spoke to advise Steph was standing by her side. He was a mostly white figure, who looked older than any normal elderly man.

His face was mostly similar to Steph's, as it was filled with a bitter expression.

His dog ears and tail were slightly drooping. Although he was draped in a kimono, his robust physique was still unmistakable. He was one of the Werebeasts, Hatsuse Ino.

He was the grandfather of the former Eastern Union ambassador (Hatsuse Izuna). The currently absent king and queen (Sora and Shiro) had forced him to handle the problems of the country…… another victim following Steph.

"Dora-kou……? Eh? Were you talking to me?"

Steph lagged in responding. Ino nodded his head.

"Yes. As this is a formal occasion, I should use my better judgment and use this suffix. Is there a problem?"

"And I was wondering who you were referring to…… please address me as [the errand girl of the king and queen] instead."

Seeing Steph's smile of low self-esteem, Ino shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid that if I were to address you so impolitely, others would also address me in a similar manner…… Back to the topic though, Dora-kou, shouldn't you be putting your focus onto the things at hand?"

Following Ino's line of sight, Steph began to remember the present situation…… she then began to speak inwardly to herself.

“Sigh…… Well said……”

Just tell yourself that you’re just going through an important game right now.

The game was not anything particularly special, as it was just normal poker.

Other than the fact that Jokers were included in this game, it was just a regular game of poker.

— Elchea had established a federation with the Eastern Union, with the former as the leader.

With Elchea’s territory doubled, there was still the matter of who it should be distributed to and what it should be used to do…

The powerful feudal lords were the ones who were reaping tremendous benefits.

From the current situation, the so-called [equal and multi-racial country] was just an illusion.

No matter how complex the system, the massive gap between the two nation’s strength could not be offset.

The day a free market economy is implemented, Elchea would probably be totally and utterly trashed.

Thus, they were trying to allocate the [continental resources] that the Eastern Union had requested for.

Although it is relevant to say that such is simply Elchea’s fate.

—— It is inevitable that whoever has the power to do so will clump together to try to maximize their benefits during these times.

For these reasons, there was a constant stream of Elchea’s feudal lords challenging Steph, who currently held legislative power, to a game with the intention of fulfilling their demands.

The result was… Steph could not sleep properly for the past two weeks, and was forced to continue playing games against them.

(Getting challenged to a game is such a good thing… yeah.)

Steph muttered in her heart, because… it was a trap.

Everything is moving smoothly as planned…

That’s right…… all is good except for the 『volume』 that I’m up against.

“『All in』—— please hurry up and strip off your clothes?”

…… what happened to her lady manners?

Because she was immensely fatigued, deep dark circles emerged under her eyes, and rage had distorted her expression—— it was simply…

Her face gave reminiscence to their fear of the 『king』. The feudal lords looked to each other.

Then they selected 『fold』 —— which means that they were now forced to obey Steph's proposal.

However —— Steph used her loud voice to render them speechless. She kicked aside her chair and stood up.

"…… Since you were willing to accept my proposal from the beginning, why did you make me waste all my time!?"

She threw the cards on the table and spread them. Her hand was……

—— Five of a kind.[3]

Even if they had not folded, it would have the same result. Everyone was eliminated at one go. Looking at that hand of cards, the feudal lords turned pale.

But Steph chose to ignore them, and turned to walk away. "If you don't win everything, you lose everything (all or nothing)! Please only return once all your hopes are shattered, okay!?"

Following which, Hatsuse Ino took over from Steph, and smiled pleasantly at them.

"Then, as 'pledged to the Oaths' earlier, I will now eliminate your memories. Sorry about that."

Part 2

— To put it bluntly, it was a ‘conflict of interests’.

Managing the recovered territories properly would profitably contribute to the countries in the alliance.

Even if we’re unwilling to hand them over, we still have to let our territories be managed by somebody. Naturally, benefits would be reaped if there is a successful outcome.

—— Or rather, we cannot do it any other way, so this is for the best after all.

The problem lay within the fact that the nobles would move against the original proposition of whose land is whose.

Thinking further, those were the territories that the former king — Steph’s deceased grandfather — had lost in his gambles.

Since he had bet with them on his own volition, there would certainly have been some of the opposition that was left dissatisfied.

But…… if that was the case, why hadn’t they used a game to stop the former king back then?

“How irresponsible of them! Whenever they lose out, they’ll cry that it’s the king’s fault! But once Sora and Shiro take the territories back, they’d rush to seize a slice for themselves…… Do these nobles not have an ounce of shame in them!?”

“Aristocracy is such a system. Won't anyone turn out like that after being like that for so long?”

Steph unhappily walked through a corridor in Elchea City. Behind her was Ino, who was smiling while he spoke.

The problem isn’t that they are aristocrats.

No matter how corrupt they are, they are still rulers with excellent knowledge on how to operate and manage territory.

As long as they had the heart and capabilities to do so, entrusting the territories to them to manage was unavoidable —— Steph thought.

The problem was……

“Just think of the nobles who were protesting earlier… each one of them practically had the words 『I’m only here to gain profit. Don’t throw any trouble my way』. AHHHHH……!!”

—— And those who deliberately act that way are all feudal lords who hold power that is impossible to overlook.

If it is not managed well, a power struggle may result…… And once a revolt has been instigated, it would give them an excuse to interfere in national affairs.

At that time…

“Wouldn’t that be easy…… easy to deal with, that is.”

The one who had come up with that plan was walking behind Steph with a sinister smile on his face —— Hatsuse Ino.

When Sora and Shiro were absent, the one left in charge of national affairs was the former king’s granddaughter (Steph)…… Such a rumor was spread on purpose.

Subsequently, this situation brought about a great opportunity. The challengers earlier, who were pursuing their own interests, had lost and were punished in accordance to the oaths. They had promised to [lose all their memories during the game], and to put it flatly, it was a [clean sweep].

As a result, the policies and beneficial punishment implemented by Steph were able to proceed smoothly with no resistance.

It was very effective, and had Ino’s style embedded in the plan —— which was developed by the multi-tribal Eastern Union to make others fall into their trap.

However, once they thought about the reason the plan was proceeding smoothly and how frequently it worked……

“Just how much do they look down on me!? They practically treat me like I am an idiot!”

—— It was easy to see that those people looked down on her and her grandfather.

“Alright, alright now. Dora-kou…… thanks to this, everything could proceed smoothly. That is the truth. We should instead be welcoming these ignorant peoples’ contempt —— and smile while we make use of them, no?”

“—— Ino-san, can you please not address me like that… Just Steph is fine.”

—— Steph was the head of the Dora family, which was the former royal family. Naturally, that meant her title was [Duchess].

Nevertheless, Steph continued speaking with a weary face.

“I’m just an errand girl. Call me that which doesn’t sound like the position of any person with honor……”

“But, when Sora-dono and Shiro-dono are absent, Stephanie-dono is essentially the representative of the royal family —— so if we were to say you are the prime minister, then doesn’t that give you the status of the noblest person in Elchea?”

Ino continued speaking with his actor-like tone.

“—— Duchess Dora is the prime minister of Elchea, Imanity’s last remaining country, and the former king’s granddaughter. She delivered such a large-scale and unprecedented plan to construct a multi-racial country that merged with the Eastern Union under Elchea’s leadership. Truly a beautiful, young and talented woman……! How would such a person be addressed?”

—— Who would that be?

Steph looked up blankly to the ceiling.

“The female protagonist of this heroic story is actually just an errand girl. The rich ironic twist to this story isn’t half bad, eh.”

Steph followed up by saying, “Do you intend to write the story and publish it?” Upon hearing this, Ino smiled wryly and proceeded to change the topic.

“But, within these two weeks, Steph did not even lose a single time. That is truly a great feat to accomplish.”

“That’s only because the opponents were weaklings.”

While Ino had given a sincere compliment, he was immediately shot down in a sentence. Steph wrinkled her brow.

“Those guys are just some foolish idiots with crude ways of cheating. If the opponent was Sora or Shiro, I’ll definitely be ridiculed to their best abilities, and then taken advantage of…… Surely I needn’t say more.”

“Well, that is indeed true……”

Nonetheless, Ino thought to himself.

Initially, Steph relied on Ino’s assistance as a Werebeast to accelerate her five senses.

But Steph continued her winning streak —— and now, Ino was only escorting her around.

Although this girl greatly underestimated her own strength…… the fact is that she is indeed — very strong.

In comparison with 『those two (Sora and Shiro)』, they are simply too strong to speak of.

As for normal Imanity, very few would be able to beat her skill.

Steph had no idea what Ino was thinking about, and continued complaining.

“And they totally didn’t realize I was cheating. Was it those feudal lords true motive simply to make me suffer from lack of sleep and die of fatigue!?”

“…… Stephanie-dono, you’re starting to sound more and more like Sora and the like.”

—— *Wham!*

Steph stomped on the floor, and stopped walking.

“—— What did you just say?”

Her body was motionless while she turned her head, and emitted a sound like her bones were vibrating.

“Did you just say…… I’m similar to that loose king who’s playing around in the Eastern Union!?”

“Pl-Please calm down! I only meant that your style of gameplay is very similar!”

—— The ways Steph had adopted to win…

They were to calculate the opening attack, hide her cards, swap her cards, and shuffling skills…

Then to see through the opponent’s cheat and use it against him, and even to bluff and mind-game[4] the opponent.

Those tactics were all learnt from —— challenging Sora and Shiro, after having failed time and time again.

The fact was that Steph was initially so afraid that if she were to lose, she would make the implementation of a federation even harder. Thus, she was so nervous that she was able to realize what Sora and Shiro would do in such a situation while in her games.

However, her lack of sleep coupled with the fact that those two had yet to come back had ignited a flame within her, thus easing all her nerves. Eventually, Steph began to unconsciously play as if she was playing against Sora and Shiro in her games.

However, the opponent was too weak and practically just trash. Steph could not tolerate herself thinking of those people as Sora and Shiro for even a second.

—— She and her grandfather…

———— were being looked down upon by such trash.

—————— That fact made it —— even harder to tolerate ———— “Ah.”

Suddenly, Steph looked as if she had suddenly been enlightened. Her expression changed completely.

“Aahh, that’s right. The nobles are just trying to get in the way of the establishment of a federation. That’s why it’s been so difficult.”

“St-Stephanie-dono?”

Seeing her change into a different person, Ino uneasily called out to her.

But, she did not seem to hear a thing…… rather, she seemed to be looking at something that was not there.

Steph’s eyes suddenly lit up with brilliance and excitement. She happily turned on the spot.

“—— Ino-san, regardless of whether we’re approached by nobles, merchants or guilds, let’s win away all their possessions, and force them to step down from their positions with nothing left on them. Everything can just be managed by the government instead! If we’re short on manpower, we’ll just grab some of the citizens and appoint them as officials. If anyone dares to do anything corrupt, we’ll just force them to spit out their guts till they’re nothing but bones. If they continue to be rotten, we’ll just arrest them and get all of them deported. This way, we can make the treasury rich, and negotiations for laws and policies can just be decided by ourselves. All our problems would be solved, right? I’m such a genius! I, I’m not an idiot…… Not an idiot～～～～～～!!”

—— And then she collapsed.

“St-Stephanie-dono, please get ahold of yourself! Such is an act of abolishment —— an act of terrorism!!”

Steph was shouting while crying and smiling. She then hit a wall with her forehead.

All of a sudden, she felt something move… as she looked to the moving sight…… in front of her was ——

—— Sora was there.

“Aaaaahhhh……!”

Where had you run off to slack around at?

He threw all the preparatory work to me, and went off to have fun by himself.

Although there were many feelings in her heart, what she was feeling most was so much joy that she was blushing because of the fact that Sora was right there.

She had no way of hiding the joy in her chest, and many complex feelings started swelling up……

“So-Sora! You’re back—— HIGII—!?”

Steph was rushing forward, but her face hit a pole and her nose started bleeding while she made strange wailing sounds.

Her body laid on the floor like a stick figure[5], and she stared at the ceiling above her…… then, she suddenly realized…

The 'Sora' that she saw was……

Was a reflection of something in the shiny polished marble column ——— [her own face].

Upon realizing this, Steph mustered a single sentence while in pain…

"………………………. I can't go on any longer."

"Stephanie-dono, you should get some sleep. No, I should say, please, you must get some sleep. I beg of you."

Ino propped up Steph who was lying paralyzed on the floor while he continued speaking.

"…… Do not worry. Sora-dono and Shiro-dono are… indeed two people who are difficult to understand."

He put in his best effort to think optimistically about the siblings who were impossible for anyone to comprehend.

"But since they are stranded in the Eastern Union, they are probably arbitrating upon certain conditions with Miko-sama…… probably?"

While the federation was established with Elchea as its leader, it was still not enough to rely only on Elchea's efforts.

"I also think that that's where they are…… they definitely should be progressing through a [summit]."

—— *Maybe it was like that.*

The actions of Sora and Shiro were always never on track.

However, their actions —— had always played a huge role in Elchea.

That was the truth.

And so they should put their faith in them —— but ——

“…… Who knows? Judging from the way that those two usually speak and act, they’re sure to confuse public and private matters, ah……”

Indeed, the fact was that their actions were always in line with their own desires.

Looking in the direction of the Eastern Union, Steph complained angrily.

“…… In any case, they’re definitely fooling around with the Kemonomimi girls right now, holing up in a room engrossed in their games, or doing something that any human being would deem incorrigible.”

…… Ino had no way of denying that statement.

Part 3

—— Now changing location. The Eastern Union's capital, Kannagari. Similar to Elchea's King City, the representative of the Werebeasts lives in Miko's Shrine[6]. The courtyard of the central edifice. It was filled with a lavish natural landscape, and where there were gaps, it was painted with either red or black. One cannot help but think that it is a Japanese garden.

This area was normally prohibited to unrelated people and the like. However, at that moment, there was a mass of people gathered next to the sacred pond.

"…… Miko-sama, what is love?"

"……Tell us, Miko-sama……" The one who was asking these questions seriously had a head of black hair and black eyes. He was a teenager who wore a shirt with 『I ♥ Imanity』 on it. Sitting on his lap was a girl with white hair and red eyes.

They were the king and queen of Elchea —— the sole representatives of Imanity, Sora and Shiro.

The truth behind the crowd was that those two were petting several species of Werebeasts —— Kemonomimi girls —— while making delicate and charming sounds. In addition, there was a long queue of Kemonomimi girls looking on with faces that were bursting with envy.

"…… What should I say? Even though there's so much to say……"

Speaking with a voice that sounded like wind chimes was a woman who was sitting on the opposite side of the game board.

No one knew her real name, and she was a golden fox with two lush tails.

She was the Werebeasts' representative who had total authority over the race —— [Miko].

"…… I've been meaning to ask the two of you…… What on earth is in your heads?"

The three people were in the middle of a game called [Corner Sparrow]. It was a unique traditional game of the Eastern Union.

—— Although it was some aspects in common with [Mahjong], it was essentially a completely different game.

"What? Ah, okay, I win again."

"…… This game…… is pretty…… interesting……"

—— They were petting the countless Werebeast girls while asking the flippant question of 'what love was’.

—– Yet, they had easily mastered this game, which they had just seen for the first time and heard the rules of only a few tens of minutes ago.

In that very short period of time, they had formulated strategies that maximize in efficiency and countless arrangements —— and even worked out a few ways to cheat.

But that was not the biggest problem…… Miko had mixed feelings, and smiled bitterly while she sighed.

“How the heck did your cheat escape my notice? Tell me?”

—– Even though she was depending on her five senses, Miko could not perceive the slightest of flaws in their movements.

Sora smiled like a hippie while replying her.

“Oh? You’re going as far as to say that we cheated? How disgraceful. But, Shiro did memorize all the cards that were facing down while tracing their positions, and I only pretended to shuffle so that I could control the cards that Shiro might need —— This isn’t to be called a cheat.”

Indeed, one of the two reasons why what they did could not be deemed as a cheat——

—– was that those two had not seen their opponent’s cards at all, and were only speculating what was in each other’s hand.

“Also, Miko did the same. We’re both in the same boat, eh?”

The second reason was that she still lost to them when under the same conditions…

They had only chatted with her for a while, yet they had already beaten her in a game that she was playing for over fifty years.

—— Her opponents had faced her directly with the strength to win, and had exceeded her in terms of points…… There was nothing she could do about that.

She had been so thoroughly defeated, yet she felt overjoyed.

Miko’s cheeks perked up as she forced a smile, while Sora began to state his demands.

“Alright, ‘as pledged to the oaths’, I may request of three things from you —— no problems there, right?”

Facing the helplessly smiling Miko, Sora continued his speech.

“Firstly, I ask you to take into account the interests of both nations, and to objectively create a tax table in accordance with the import and export of different goods.”

Compared to Elchea, the Eastern Union knew their mainland resources like the back of their hands. That should have been obvious enough.

Then, the only person who could accurately evaluate the gap between the two countries’ national strength, and also to strive to meet the interests of both sides, was [Miko], the sole representative of the Eastern Union. There was not a more appropriate candidate around.

Since it is to implicitly ‘take into account the interests of both countries’, the benefits cannot go unilaterally to the Eastern Union.

Miko admired in her heart the fact that there were never any holes in their plans, but…

“…… In other words, you guys are throwing all the work onto me once again……”

In the past half a month, Sora and Shiro were really hard at [work].

They visited Miko’s residence every day, and bet for the interests of both countries in games.

…… Indeed, they were remarkably efficient in their work. They had been victorious over Miko in every single game. If you were to overlook how they threw all of their substantive workload onto Miko, it was an impeccable feat.

“Specialized work should be assigned to those who specialize in it. Since Miko-sama only spent half a century to unite this huge country, I believe in your abilities ♪”

Upon hearing how easily Sora replied her, Miko laughed while scratching her hair.

The federal system used by the two combined nations…

It seemed to be a reference to their original world’s United States of America. This move was unprecedented, and thus involved numerous obstacles which needed solutions and compromises to be made. The friction between the two countries also needed to be reduced to a minimum. So, they decided to throw all of these things to Miko to get resolved.

In truth, that was the most correct approach. Although Sora and Shiro were super gamers, they were no politicians.

However, Miko’s forced smile was for a different reason.

As of that day, she had attempted to win against Sora and Shiro several times —— and failed.

This time, she thought she would be able to win with a game they had never seen before, but she still suffered a beautiful defeat.

In addition, she had used a lot of tricks, hoping to win some benefits for the Eastern Union…… but the result was that she completely failed to trick or win against them.

However, to formulate the policy in this way, as Sora and Shiro said, it would thoroughly meet the 'interests of both countries'. However, be it Elchea or the Eastern Union, there would be some short-term losses, but long-term benefits will definitely be reaped on both sides —— looking at the records of these documented policies, Miko could not help but sigh.

She had no complaints.

However, since she was always trying to deceive those two with cheats, she began to feel a little guilty.

The problem lay with their second request which was incidentally…

"Okay, the second request is as usual —— let us stroke Miko-sama!"

"…… stroke……"

—— Indeed, they would senselessly bet for the rights to stroke Miko every time before starting the game.

"Well, since you are seriously considering government policies, I'll let you have a touch……"

Miko sighed while looking at the stack of documents that was constantly piling up.

Then, she slowly swung her two golden tails over to them to let them touch.

"OKAY! It's here! Let's go, Shiro!"

"…… Today we must definitely…… make Miko moan……"

With shining eyes, Sora and Shiro pounced onto Miko. Miko laughed bitterly while she thought ——

—— the Werebeasts who are the Exceed's fourteenth ranked race…

They could exceed the limits of their body's physical capabilities.

This was naturally impossible for humans to achieve, and needless to say, it defied the laws of physics.

The way they used to make this possible —— was to rely on the elementals within their body.

…… All life in this world had some amount of 'Elemental' within their bodies.

There were elemental corridors to retain strength or make connections that were like nerves — and the [external elementals (magic)] was what determined the ranks. As the fourteenth rank, the Werebeasts had a meagre connection, and were thus incapable of using magic.

But as for [the elementals within each body], the only race who would be unconscious to their use was the Imanity.

The Werebeasts utilized the strength of their bodies' elementals to achieve heights that humans would be amazed at.

A good example would be [Bad Blood] which was used by Izuna and Miko.

By controlling the elementals within their body, they could enhance the performance of their body and cast a field of self-destruction. That was the skill of the Werebeasts.

But the price paid for circulating elementals through their bodies was a special phenomenon that endlessly causes disorder.

And that specific phenomenon had a greater impact depending on how weak the body of the Werebeast is.

The result on the Werebeast race was a chronic disorder of the elementals within one’s body, especially seen in women and children…… which was followed by discomfort.

It was not easy to solve this problem alone.

………… after saying so much, what was trying to be conveyed was……

“…… Fluffy fluffy …… pet pet…… hehe……”

“ —— !”

Under Shiro’s touch, Miko almost let out an ecchi sound, but managed to keep it in by dispersing her attention.

Sora and Shiro…… those two’s technique of leading around the elementals within her body was —— abnormally clever.

Imanity should not be able to see elementals though.

Even if they were from another world, the technique to lead around Elementals belonged to the field of high magic.

And yet, those two were……

“—— Hng, right here!”

“———————— ! !”

…… The reaction was instantaneously captured with the touch that had substantially leaded around the elementals.

The result was inadvertently the elimination of the chronic disorder in the Werebeasts due to the disorder in their body's elementals.

This is… how would you call it —— probably an exceedingly charismatic masseur?

—— It's only natural that this would attract such a long queue, right?

"…… What else? You did say that you wanted 'three' requests today…… Ah."

Because of the accurate touch, she almost let out an ecchi sound. Miko forcibly repressed it and bet on this opportunity to ask the two of them a question.

"…… It's about time to state it, right? Of course, I think it has something to do with this situation, right?"

She looked to Sora and Shiro who were being hugged by Werebeast girls who were strangers to them, while they alternated between petting the crowd.

To this point, Miko had been pretty much dying to say that. But, first putting that aside……

The two of them had their mouth and nose covered, and each wrapped with a towel that seemed to be borrowed from Izuna.

Sora was wearing what looked to be cat ears, and Shiro was wearing rabbit ears. Jibril stood behind them, and for some reason or another, she had slightly drooping dog ears on her head. Izuna stood by her side, with eyes eagerly looking onto Sora and Shiro who were petting Werebeast girls, as if waiting for her turn.

Miko then narrowed her eyes to look at the last person.

ゴゴゴゴゴゴゴ

In her line of vision was a Dhampir girl who crouched in the corner of the room whose body was constantly shivering.

“Last night, after I rejected the request issued by Plum, — the Dhampir over there — she went all over Kannagari to advertise the petting skills of Shiro and me.”

The result seemed to be the long queue of Werebeast girls waiting to be stroked.

They had clearly covered their faces and used the space to divert others’ attention while going to Miko’s shrine, but the moment they stepped out and walked a little, the scenario completely changed…… Sora shrugged his shoulders and laughed bitterly.

“She threatened to keep up this troublesome behavior until I promised to rescue the Dhampir race.”

“………… Is that so……”

“Master, this should be enough. You should just use a game and bet for her head, win, then chop her head off ♥”

“I’m s-s-sorry…… b-but this is an important matter which involves the survival of an entire race!”

A single glance by Jibril who was emitting a murderous aura caused Plum to huddle in her corner and let out a cry of misery.

“—— That is, regarding my third request……” “Un.”

“Please use your status as the werebeasts’ sole representative to order them that, whenever we take the initiative to go out, they are not to come looking for us. If not, they’d just line up outside the main door of Izuna’s house, and we’d be too scared to enter their line of sight that we wouldn’t even touch the door, and thus be unable to state the original purpose of our visit.”

…………

—— Miko looked as if she had much to say.

But, in order to hear what his original purpose was, she used a sharp tone and spoke.

“—— Step down.”

With only that sentence, the Kemonomimi girls were immediately so scared that their hair stood on edge.They then repeatedly bowed their heads while scrambling to escape from the shrine’s garden.

Moreover, Shiro was waving goodbye in the direction of their backs.

“That should be it. —— So, what was it you wanted to talk seriously about?”

Miko had an intolerant expression when she asked. Sora nodded solemnly in response.

“Yup, —— it’s a major issue that puts both Elchea and the Eastern Union at stake.”

Sora started the topic, and no longer had his usual slovenly appearance. He wore a very serious look on his face, like he had encountered a problem which was extremely difficult to solve.

Accordingly, Miko proceeded to sit opposite Sora.

Sora said, “You know the capital in the sea that’s south of the Eastern Union; the country called Oceando?"

“That’s our neighbouring country. Of course I know of it. It’s the nation of the Seirens.”

—— Seirens.

The Exceed’s fifteenth ranked, which was above Imanity by a single rank, and below the Werebeasts by a single rank.

Their capital was located beneath the deep sea, and because they could only live underwater, they were not interested in acquiring territories.

They were also a race with a special ecology, and thus they have minimal transactions with other nations and were closed off to the rest of the world.

What on earth is the purpose of bringing up the country composed of those people……?

Miko stared with that question in her eyes. Sora responded with a vigorous nod. “Indeed. This is something that involves them, Miko-sama…”

Sora inhaled deeply.

“… Like I was saying, Miko-sama, what is love?”

“I’ll say this one more time. If you’re asking for a fight, I can take you on. ♥”

Miko’s smile stretched through her face —— but she exuded an aura which looked as if she was preparing to activate [Bad Blood].

Her fur turned slightly reddish, and she let out a low growl.

Part 4

—— Returning to a time some time back: last night.

The H-game was set at a different location, so as Sora had declared, he coldly rejected all demands.

Plum clung onto Sora’s feet, begging wildly while on the verge of bursting into tears.

“P-Please wait! I can only ask this of you, Your Majesty!”

“You’re irritating! I do not intend to get involved with something that clearly rated M-18! Please get yourselves acquainted with these limits!”

The race known as the [Dhampirs] used a white turbid liquid to substitute for blood as food.

—— Regardless of whatever manner it was to be implemented, it would be sent to the restricted area of the room with no excuses.

“No, it’s ——— Ahh, no, some people also became like that……”

“This has indeed turned into an H-game story!”

“P-Please listen to my explanation! If we go on like this, our race will perish!”

“…Uhh?”

“……Un?”

Sora and Shiro suddenly stopped what they were doing. Hearing those words made it impossible for them to ignore the situation.

The line of vision of those two intersected to confirm something.

—— A race perishing is a worrisome issue.

“…… I’ll listen to what you have to say. But hear this. If I judge the topic to touch on hentai, we’re ending this conversation immediately.”

Sora reluctantly sat on the floor cross-legged, and sighed when he finished his sentence.

Shiro sat on Sora’s lap, and Jibril followed to sit beside them.

As for Izuna —— perhaps due to fatigue, she huddled next to Sora’s body, and nodded off into sleep.

“Th---Thank you very much!”

Plum wore a teary eyed expression, and repeatedly bowed at Sora.

“Ugh…… Please hold on a moment……”

Some irregular patterns emerged out of her purple pupils……

All of a sudden…

…

—– What on earth were they doing?

In that short time, Jibril appeared before Plum’s face, and Izuna jumped in a spiral to go behind Plum.

The actions of those two resulted in a surplus of air, which was still blowing through the room.

“……Eh?”

Plum screamed while staring blankly at Jibril’s sharp eyes who were staring back at hers.

“Don’t think you’re something great just because you managed to get close to Master. But if you really think I will be silly and let you succeed a second time, let me tell you this —– know your place, you little worm.”

“Grandpa said that once I sense the scent of the magic of Dhapmirs, I must immediately avoid the other party’s eyes, des.”

Izuna growled. Her voice was cold and filled with wariness.

At this point, Sora trembled in fear and trepidation. To the two people who had their guards up, he said, “I-I think…… because of the [Ten Oaths], she should not be able to cause any harm, right?”

“Even if it does not result in harm, it is possible to disguise another’s cognition. That is to say…”

Her hostile gaze shifted to Plum’s [side].

“Concealing over there, a gigantic luggage —– or such.”

Jibril stared to an empty space as if there was something there. Plum waved frantically while she tearfully explained the situation.

“Th-This is a misunderstanding! I had only applied the disguising of cognition to myself!”

—– With a thunderous sound, numerous suitcases appeared from nowhere.

“…………Un.”

Izuna sniffed with her nose, and then let her down her guard and returned to Sora and Shiro’s side.

“As I had too much luggage, because of that… I just disguised the existence of the bags so that it would be easier to carry……”

It was at this time that Sora and Shiro grasped the situation and widened their eyes in surprise.

“In other words… you hid the [existence] of your luggage, thus eliminating their weight?”

“No, it only removes the feeling of the volume and weight. It does not imply the luggage disappeared.”

“So, when you first appeared, you were so fatigued because of…”

“…… This reason……?”

“S-Sorry…… ‘cuz it’s too heavy……”

Plum constantly bowed to apologize, but Jibril on the other hand…

“The Dhampirs’ [disguises and illusions] —— they are at times superior to the Elves in regards to affecting one’s cognition through magic. Those trunks of luggage had always been here…… we were just not aware of them.”

“Uwa, but Jibril was aware of them?”

“It makes me sad to admit this but if I was not paying attention, I would have overlooked it. There will never be a second time.”

Jibril spoke with clenched fists and a lowered head. Nonetheless, Sora’s gaze moved to her side.

“…… Izuna, why did you drop your guard?”

“……? Because I did not smell the scent of lies, des?”

Perhaps she had become fatigued from moving so suddenly. Izuna had curled up into a ball, and yawned when she replied.

“Un.” —— Sora and Shiro narrowed their gaze.

In front of their eyes was Plum. She had flipped over her luggage and looked as if she was searching for something.

Then, she said, “I-I found it!” She unfolded a document…

“Umm, ugh…… rumor has it that Sora-sama intends to unite all the races.”

"……Yeah."

That was the external reason.

They had merged with the Eastern Union and were preparing to create a federation —— such a large matter should have already been exposed to the public. But as for who was controlling the race pieces, it should be a secret kept between Sora, Shiro and Miko.

As he did not feel any special need to mention this, Sora simply expressed his affirmation.

"Let me get right to the point…"

Feeling satisfied at Sora's reply, Plum continued her speech.

"Currently, we, the Dhampirs and Seirens, are on the verge of extinction. Although we've tried every possible way…… we are still powerless. So we hope to rely on the assistance of Sora-sama and his companions."

……——— Umm.

"Jibril, can you explain to me how the Dhampirs are related to the Seirens?"

Upon hearing Sora's inquiry, Jibril quietly accepted his order and lowered her head. She began her explanation to Sora.

"After the implementation of the [Ten Oaths], the Dhampirs could not absorb the blood of others without permission. Thus, they have to live relying on others —— the Seirens are also in a similar situation."

"…… Heh?"

"…… the [Seirens]…… the fifteenth ranked…… are a race that can only…… live in the ocean."

Shiro began to proceed with her explanation.

The Exceed's fifteenth ranked Seirens —— to simply put it, they were a race of [mermaids].

They lived in the shallow portion of the ocean, and had the upper body of a human and had a fish tail instead of legs.

Their ecology had certain particularities. The first of which was… that they could not leave the ocean for a long time.

Because of this, they built an undersea city named [Oceando] which was a vast maritime territory.

The second particularity was that they were a race with only females.

In other words, their way of reproducing…

"…… requires…… [a male of a different race]……"

After hearing Shiro's explanation, Sora looked to Jibril with half-open eyes.

"I say, be it the [Dhampirs] or the [Seirens], aren't the biological defects of this world too serious?"

"There were no issues in the beginning… only after the implementation of the [Ten Oaths]."

Jibril continued her speech.

"As the Seirens only needed to catch another race's male and eat him, and the Dhampirs can just suck blood without saying anything, there were no problems. But, they cannot do harm to others because of the [Ten Oaths] —— perhaps other races had been hurt —— but they should be the ones who were most deeply hurt."

Jibril had a smile on her face, and emitted a murderous aura while talking about the past. Sora directed a question to her. "……Sigh, what do you mean by…… catching to eat? Exactly as it implies?"

At that moment, a grim image of girls, whose lower half was that of fishes, taking big bites and chewing up other races flashed through his mind… This may have fallen under the M-18 ban for a different reason. Sora shuddered at the thought.

However, Jibril shook her head.

"No, because Master said to be healthy, so I put it subtly. It has a sexual meaning."

"How can there be such a heaven in existence?! I want to go! Jibril, let's set off immediately!"

Sora joyfully stood up, but Jibril replied in surprise.

"You'd be extracted until exhaustion or even death. Is that really okay?"

"How can there be such a hell in existence… I don't want to go…… I'd never go there in my life!"

…… The mermaids could not reproduce unless they drained the life of someone of another race.

How much does this world want to betray my hopes and common sense until it is satisfied……

Sora's mood instantly hit bottom. He sighed and sat back down.

Not understanding why Sora was dejected, Jibril continued her explanation.

"Anyway, the Dhampirs and Seirens are races that cannot live without causing harm onto others. With the [Ten Oaths] hurting their survival, at such a time, the Dhampirs must have set their target on the

Seirens.”

Sora nodded.

“Yeah, ranking them as fifteenth between Imanity and the Werebeasts was a fitting choice. That means they cannot use magic either, right? No wonder the Dhampirs, who are experts at illusions and disguise magic, unilaterally intend to bait them out for food.”

Both races which were on the verge of extinction would not be worried about bets, I suppose.

The atmosphere was still full of murderous intent, but as it pertained to a matter of survival…

Jibril was smiling happily instead.

“Unfortunately, this matter seems to have turned a right angle and dramatically changed…… it has become an issue well known all over the world.”

—— Rather than going up a ramp, they were growing in the direction of a right angle. Jibril continued her speech happily.

“Getting bitten by a Dhampir will result in a [disease]…… I believe I’ve said this before.”

“Yeah……”

“To simply put it, the disease is that [you will die if you get exposed to sunlight]. Since they are already unable to go ashore and have always lived under the sea, the disease does not constitute a problem to the Seirens.” “—— Un? Eh, that is to say?”

At that point, Plum smiled weakly and replied, “……Yes, we Dhampirs —— made this [symbiotic] proposal……”

Jibril continued speaking. “They adopted a strategy for the Seirens to provide blood, and the Dhampirs to provide magic to bait out other races for food. The Dhampirs intended to put up a [united front] with the Seirens.”

“That is really…”

“…… Amazing……”

Sora and Shiro praised them together in their hearts.

Even though they were facing the crisis of extinction, and it was impossible for them to pull any tricks ——

To think they managed to come up with the perfect escape route that takes each other’s interests into account, and it was a correct and problematic proposal ——

"Yeah, they really are a race that greatly stupefies others —— I'm referring to the Seirens."

—— *What?*

Jibril then smiled towards the pitiful Plum while she continued speaking.

"Because, to the Dhampirs who they are coexisting with —— the Seirens have actually [taken a bite] ~♪"

…………Eh?

"The result is that the Dhampirs lost tragically to the Seirens. The Dhampirs are now forced to find males to help the Seirens reproduce, and the males of the Dhampirs are forbidden from sucking the blood of any race other than the Seirens. What a baffling contract."

…………——— Huh?

Perhaps even with Shiro's intelligence, she had not foreseen such a situation. She looked towards Jibril and could not help but suspect that she misheard those words. "…… Haha…… this is really so hilarious."

Opposite them, Plum had somewhat of an expression of despair.

"My ancestors probably did not expect that —— the Seirens did not understand the consequences of the [Ten Oaths], and unconsciously contributed to their own extinction, I think…… haha."

—— With her face full of misfortune, a gloomy smile emerged on her considerably fatigued face. "…… Ugh……? …… Nii…… What's…… going on?"

Shiro tilted her head in confusion, as if she had just been handed someone else's big mess.

Sora responded to her and said, "—— Ahh~ In other words, I hope it isn't……"

Although it was an incredulous thought… Sora still proceeded to say it.

"The Dhampirs did not use their magic and made a fake game, and proposed that if there was a tie, they would have a symbiotic relationship with each other… But, the Seirens did not understand the intentions of the Dhampirs and won the game unilaterally, and were so happy with the outcome —— am I right?"

From Jibril's pitying smile and Plum's exhausted smile, one could tell it was [totally correct].

"……Sigh, the Seirens are idiots after all…"

"Their reputation reverberates to the heavens. The super idiots of three thousand worlds ♥ "

"They really are a race that's stupid to the extreme……haha."

"Grandpa said that they were more stupid than hairless apes, des."

Jibril who looked full of contempt, Plum, and even Izuna who should have been asleep, answered Sora's question without hesitation.

"…… This is too much. To think there was a race that could be looked down on more than the Imanity…… I am a little touched."

However, Jibril continued her speech with a smile on her face.

"Well, that way, things get very interesting too ♪"

First, she put up a finger.

"To begin with, the Dhampirs can [survive] by consuming body fluids other than blood."

Then, she put up two fingers.

"But [growth] requires blood —— if they do not mix their souls, they will always maintain a child-like appearance."

Then, three fingers were put up.

"Because the Seirens need to suck the blood of only the males of other races, but are barred from doing so because of the Oaths. However, because they will maintain the appearance of a child, the Dhampirs will be unable to reproduce amongst themselves. Thus, in order to obtain blood, the males have to obey the Seirens, and in order to give birth, the females also have to obey the Seirens."

Following which, she put up four fingers.

"Even if a Seiren were to disobediently flee from the city, they would still carry a [disease] —— that should be enough to understand, right?"

Finally, with a smile, Jibril put up five fingers.

"Because the Dhampirs have such idiotic opponents, they have been accidentally been driven to a corner. ♪"

…………

Shiro had already lost interest in this foolish story and was playing with her nails.

Sora was also looking confused at the ceiling. Suddenly…

What Plum said flashed through Sora's mind.

—— "Ahh, no, some people also became like that."…

…… Let’s try to sort out this information and think through before judging them.

First of all, the Dhampir females have no obligation to obey the Seirens, so they can leave.

It’s just that they would continue to have a child’s appearance.

But as long as they have the body fluids of other races, they can survive.

Under such conditions, the appropriate body fluid ranked behind blood is [that]?

And she said that —— some people also became like that……?

—— Wait, just wait a moment.

———………… then that’s a ——— legitimate loli[7]———

“B-But, we have solved this issue once in the past……”

“Eh, aha, ihh? What did you say?”

Sora had just become completely biased.

Everything Plum said seemed to somewhat confusing so she pulled back.

“What we said after speaking about the [Ten Oaths]… The Dhampirs have been successful in establishing a symbiotic relationship.”

Jibril nodded, and continued speaking.

“The essence that the Seirens require from males —— the [soul essence] must be won and depleted before reproduction —— however, when [a single generation comes from a single person], and the rest are still living, the amount of soul essence required for breeding that is to be extracted will not cause the death of the ingested individual, so…”

“The Dhampirs are only with absolute compliance to [her] for [assistance with reproduction]. —— With her identity as the [queen], every generation of Seirens come from the sole representative. They take the approach to [only have the Queen reproduce].”

“—— Ohh!”

“…… a clever trick……”

Sora clapped his hands to express his admiration, and Shiro clapped similarly as if she was presenting an offering to the Gods.

“The Dhampirs are pretty much just [assisting the Seirens with reproduction], and it isn’t in violation of the Oaths. On the other hand, they can also deny the Seirens if they mean to extract energy from them until they die. The Dhampirs also have blood they can suck… Wow, is this not a perfect situation to be in?”

So it was like this… although major mistakes were made, this gorgeous drama had a nice plot twist.

They managed to make it such that neither will perish while establishing a system that ensures the continuity of both races.

In other words, they had successfully achieved the [interracial coexistence] that Sora and his companions were trying to achieve, and did so earlier than them.

“… This is sure enough of a great feat. The Dhampirs aren’t ranked twelfth for nothing.”

“Unfortunately, Master, that system had collapsed because of the queen of that generation.”

—— *Just how many plot twists are there in this story?*

“…… Then what good did the queen of that generation do?”

Sora asked with cold eyes, but Jibril remained smiling, though this time she had her fingers on both hands stretched open.

‘—— Nothing-at-all~ ♥’ was Jibril’s reply.

Plum, who originally wore an expression of misfortune, now looked as if her soul was about to come out of her, and she laughed bitterly for a while.

“She left me with the message, ‘Let me sleep until my prince comes. I will not wake up till then.’ …… And then she was out cold.”

————— Ah?

Jibril was grinning madly. *What made her smile that much?*

“In other words, the Dhampirs can undergo reproduction with the Seiren’s [current queen] as long as they do not die… But when her mother was still the queen, she was affected by some fairytale and pledged to the Ten Oaths then left that sentence and entered an eternal sleep.”

…… Hey, hey, are you kidding me?

“Until the prince that makes her fall in love appears — in other words, only if someone [pledges by the Oaths] through the [game] that she had set would she ever wake up. Also, this [Cold Sleep] that she is in is similar to the [Bad Blood] ability of the Werebeasts. It is an ability of the Seirens to continue sleeping for a thousand years or more. But!”

Jibril said this while sitting with good posture, then started fanning herself.

“Okay, my audience. The world’s stupidest [truth] is finally coming to an end. ♪”

…… Did she take herself for a storyteller?

Jibril happily continued on with her unique manner of speech.

“Ah, well then!! The queen did set a certain [game] — But!”

“In the end, how would one make her fall in love with him while she was sleeping!!”

——…… Everyone had nothing to say.

Plum just watched from afar with a weak smile.

Sora looked like he was enduring a headache, and Shiro was already yawning, while Izuna was sleeping soundly.

Jibril, who was the only one in high spirits, continued her speech.

“The original excuse that the Dhampir males used to reject reproduction was that they would only help by undergoing reproduction when the other party, [the queen], was on the verge of death —— But, here comes the question! What would happen if the queen sleeps and never wakes up?”

She then opened the fan…… and acted as if she had become limp.

“The current queen has entered [cold sleep] for eight hundred years now, and the former queen has already passed on. They waited for the current queen to see if she could wake up naturally after a few hundred years…… the result was —— the Dhampir males gradually got eaten ——”

Following which, Jibril bowed deeply.

“This infamous situation reverberated throughout the seven continents as the stupidest history to have ever existed in the world. What do you think about this, my audience? —— the next performer seems to be ready to perform now. Let me take a bow, and adieu.”

“…… I’m not particularly ready, but whatever…… I get where this is going.”

It was no wonder why everyone thought those races had perished long ago.

—— However, there was still a single doubt.

“After the last Dhampir male had been eaten, wouldn’t that result in the Seirens’ extinction?”

“…… If the Seirens even had a brain to understand this situation…… I wouldn’t have to go through all this trouble……”

“……Eh? Don’t tell me —— they didn’t do this intentionally……?”

Seeing Plum's voided eyes stare blankly at him, Sora could not help but feel a little scared.

So that's how it turned out like this?

"—— Truth be told, there is only one male remaining…… and he is still too young……"

…… Which means there's only five seconds to their extinction. Sora understood that, but……

"How are we supposed to help in such a situation? From what I just heard, all the cards are already down on the table."

"Ah, the story told by the Flugels actually has a follow-up!"

Since they were finally getting to the topic, Plum's expression suddenly brightened up.

"Although the queen is currently in the state of [cold sleep], she still retains her consciousness! So if we were to gather all the fragments of her conscience —— and intervene with a spell in her [dreams] so that she can meet her love within her dreams —— such a [Dating Sim] would thus be possible!"

…… Oh —— so now it's a [dating sim], eh…… Sora could not help but laugh.

"Jibril, does interfering with dreams violate the [Ten Oaths]?"

"Yes, if no harm is intended and no danger will be caused directly —— and more so in this case, the queen is waiting for her beloved prince. The fact is that this counts as her consent to the situation?"

Plum nodded and proceeded to renew her request.

"—— Please let the [queen] fall in love with you! In order to do this, I've prepared a countermeasure!"

Sora and Shiro looked to each other's' faces —— they already had their answer.

Sora and Shiro had the goal of [conquering the sixteen races] —— so helping out was the only option from the beginning.

But Sora expressed that even so, there were still things that must be confirmed.

"When we win that game, what will be our reward?"

Plum removed her cheat sheet once again.

"Uh…… [Providing 3% of the underwater resources of Oceando, and establishing permanent friendly relations]."

Plum was sighing while reciting that sentence.

"…… it took me a week to make the Seirens understand the reality of the situation, make them accept and obtain this condition…… sigh……"

As it turned out, this condition was not too bad.

But Sora's stern expression showed he was very concerned about one thing.

"…… And, and also…… that……"

Plum coyly played with her fingers —— and then aimed with her eyes.

Looking towards her great volume of luggage, she bowed her head while her face was fully flushed red.

"I, I can be at your disposition…… so, so I brought all my household items (luggage) along with me. ——"

"Quit stuttering. Everyone! We're gonna step in earlier and save the people on the brink of extinction!!"

— Sora completed his preparations and looked like he was ready to run out the door.

With loving eyes, he spoke to Plum.

"Please rest your worries, Miss. There is no [Dating Sim] game I have not mastered."

So hurry and tell me the details.

Then we'll leave as soon as possible for me to obtain my legitimate lolis —— !

Looking at how intense Sora's gaze was, Plum exposed an expression of joy.

"Y-Yes! Uh, because of the [dream interference], you can freely set the location, and basically… the aim of the game is to make the queen fall for you and confess to you!"

What flashed through Sora's mind was —— [Tokimeki Memorial].[8]

For a G-rated dating sim, Sora confirmed… that there would be no problems.

'There are no characters that I cannot conquer' was what Sora affirmed in his heart, but——

"That's for a dating sim where there are conditions set to fulfil and all dialogues and actions are immediate!"

…………

Sora and Shiro exchanged glances, and smiled while nodding at each other —— then, they decided that their original verdict should be……

…… Overthrown.

“No need to discuss any further, I refuse. Please return.”

“…… byebye…… gambatte…… don’t go extinct.”

The two of them laughed while saying those words.

Part 5

"… But why? The conditions aren't bad, are they?"

Miko, who had been quietly listening to the situation, briefly expressed her feelings.

"Well, I had long wanted the undersea resources of the Sirens, so what's the problem? You should go save them and establish friendly relations ── wouldn't that be a pretty good condition for the Elchea Federation (of yours)?"

Indeed, she was Miko ── a faint smile surfaced on her face, and she understood everything clearly.

What Plum had said about [only being able to beg Sora and his companions] had come to be spread around.

The Dhampirs and Sirens ── were left with nothing to gamble.

In general, the friendly relations alone or that degree of resources did not constitute enough of a reason to help them.

If one wanted their territories or resources, they'd get it as long as they ignored them and let them perish.

As being subdued did not add any harm on their side or affect the race's survival, there was nothing to be earned to begin with.

But ──

With the goal of uniting the [exceed] ── Sora and Shiro were the exceptions.

It would be bothersome even if a single race were to perish.

The Eastern Union wants their resources, and it can also be used to lessen the gap between the national strength of the two nations.

Also… if they were successful, the Elchea Federation will have two races added in.

Impeccably, it was indeed good terms.

── Sora shook his head in anguish and stared at Plum.

"…… But this is impossible, Miko-sama…… didn't you hear earlier? The [game] that Plum was speaking about."

"Mhmm, [a romance game], right? What's the issue?"

The perplexed look on Miko's face remained, and she sounded surprised when she asked that question. But Sora clutched his head in irritation, and revised what he had said.

"—– No, it is a [romance game where the likability factors are uncertain with real-time dialogue and actions]."

"……What's the difference?"

"Very much of it! That's not a dating sim! That's an [actual romance game]!"

Sora exaggeratedly waved his hand and shouted.

"No, a real romance game…… Is that even a game!? And then again… what is love!?"

It was a really philosophical question.

…However, since it was proposed as a game, Sora naturally did some incomparably serious investigation on it.

He said, "If it was like usual romance games, things would be easier. To put it simply, all you need to do is reach the conditions and increase your [likeability]. But what about this situation? This guy actually just casually said that this is where the likeability factors are not certain, and the dialogue and actions are unrestricted, and it's even going to happen in real time! I'll ask again. Is that even a [game]!?"

……Ancient Greece.

The philosophers and debaters of that time would probably have asked themselves questions similar to this.

Sora gave off an aura similar to them. With fist still dramatically raised, he began an unceasing torrent of loud declarations.

"What is the reality of [love]!? Can games with such an ambiguous concept be called a game? With no meaningfully stipulated cards, combos, or playing style, can a poker like this even be called a game!?"

… To add on, what is love (恋爱)?

Love – is longing (恋) and affection (爱).

…… it's two words.

First, the forms of these words are different.

Since they're of different forms, the pronunciations are also different.

With different pronunciations, the meaning is definitely dissimilar.

Longing and affection… At the end of the day, what exactly are they?

The sages of the past had said before to love thy neighbor. But he does not tell you to go sleep with your neighbor's wife.

……Sora spoke with sincere eyes.

In contrast, Miko's eyes were icy cold when she replied.

"…Isn't that just nice for you? You can use your silver tongue to deceive her into falling in love with you, yeah? Isn't constructing frauds something you're a master at?"

However, when Sora and Shiro heard what she said, they looked in pain as they shook their heads in reply.

"……Can't do it……"

"Yeah, seems like there's still something I must state, Miko-sama."

The sharpness of their gaze increased intensely.

"… No matter what the game, Kuuhaku is undefeatable. There are only [two] games…… we have never broken through, no, we have never understood the rules of, and thus never played it well."

And those are…

"——[reality life simulation games] and [reality love simulation games]…!"

In the world of the past, what was at the peak of over two hundred and eighty games was a blank. This made the siblings become an urban legend only passed on by word of mouth. They were the flawless two-man team—— Imanity's strongest games 『 』.

—— But please do not forget that……

In reality, they are just two virgin otakus without friends and with communication disorders…!!

Upon saying this, Sora and Shiro had an immaculate gaze… and their upright figures exuded an immense amount of pride.

Turning their beliefs into a reality, they changed to grandeur existences.

Also, the aura they were emitting…… made the particles in the air tremble.

I ♥ 人類

“Y-You certainly are my masters —— so shocking and grandeur!”

“I don’t really get it, but, you two are really cool, des.”

Jibril and Izuna swallowed a gulp of saliva in surprise.

“Being proud of being amateurs at something made you guys into this state, eh…… It feels rather awe-inspiring.”

“…… For me, having such a state of mind is greatly perplexing……”

Miko and Plum gave their calm opinions.

“Thusly, we wish to discuss the conditions with Miko-sama, and keep our stance of giving no reply to the request for now.”

“…… Oh, is that so……”

“So Miko-sama, please tell us what love is?”

“…… tell us…… Miko-sama……”

They asked with serious faces, but Miko only sighed.

She returned to her seat and played with her tails as if she was grooming herself.

“…Well, what is love?” Miko replied coldly.

“From when I could first think sensibly, I had only ever considered the Werebeasts —— that is to say, the Eastern Union’s matters. I’ve been struggling with that till now…… So to say what love is? Once upon a time, I had even forgotten to think about such a thing……”

With withdrawn eyes, Miko murmured as if she was recalling her distant past.

… And why is that?

Sora and Shiro were tremendously familiar with what she was going through.

“Is that so……”

“……then we’re left with no options……”

After saying that, the two sighed simultaneously and then turned to face Plum.

“Sorry, Plum. All we can do now is ask you to give up. Hope you don’t go extinct!”

“…… persevere and survive!”

Being so easily discarded for the third time, she began crying with distressed shouts.

“Please just listen to what I have to say? I had said I had prepared a [countermeasure]!”

Plum shouted with tears in her eyes while pointing to her cheat sheet.

“T-The Dhampirs didn’t just get eaten away without doing anything…… We have been analyzing the queen for many years… and at last we came up with an absolute strategy for this game!”

However, Sora and Shiro looked to have no interest in it.

They were following Miko while trying to find the bifurcation of their own hair. It looked like they had no intention of replying.

“…… there’s a method to win on your own…… so gambatte……”

Plum groaned and went ‘Waaaa～～’, then shouted at the top of her lungs.

“～～～～ rather than just speaking about it, why don’t you look at my evidence! Sora-sama!”

Then, she extended her hand and pointed at Sora while shouting.

“Please name anyone who can never fall in love with you!”

“Anyone.”

“……Eh?”

Sora played with his nails. His reply was calm and immediate. When Plum heard it, she froze in that moment.

In contrast, Sora was gazing in the distance —— like a monk giving a sermon, he looked calm and at peace.

“If not for the use of the [pledges], no one would fall in love with me even if the world were to end.”

As if he had just set forth the truth of impermanence… he continued preaching his situation like he was an enlightened one.

“…Th-That’s… I really sympathize with you.”

The grandeur-turned-Buddha-like Sora had indirectly forced Plum into saying that.

Then, she tried to put forward alternative solutions…

“Th-Then, can we use *that* on Sora-sama……?”

“Hngh?”

"Use a magic to make the queen — [forcibly fall in love]!"

—— Sora unconsciously let out an 'Oh.'

Of course. Since the condition for her to awaken was for her to fall in love, if there was that kind of magic, it does count as a victory.

If that's the case, the situation is different…

On the other hand, Jibril began to harbor doubts and suspicions in her eyes after hearing that statement.

"…What does it mean to forcibly fall in love? Because of the [Ten Oaths], that should not be possible…"

But Plum looked like she had long waited for that question to be asked.

"Yup, it should not be possible under normal circumstances! However, the queen intentionally fell asleep hoping for someone [who can make her fall in love]… in other words, it is her [consent]. Thus, we can use this to interfere with her feelings!"

Her reasoning followed the same reasoning with interfering in the dream… Plum had both hands on her hips when she spoke.

Seeing Plum stand tall, it added a sense of confidence to her face that was usually oozing with misfortune. Sora judged that… she actually looked confident.

Thus, he winked at Jibril and nodded his head.

"Well, if even I, who does not understand the feelings of love, can be effective in this, I guess there is indeed a way to emerge victorious."

Sora spoke while he walked forward.

"Then why don't you try it out on me, and let Shiro be the judge of its effectiveness…"

But…

"…… can't……"

Seeing Sora walk forward, Shiro pulled his shirt to stop him.

"Eh? What is it? Shiro."

"…… can't."

"…………"

Shiro’s gaze wavered for a split second… and really only a very short split second.

And Sora could not detect the reason why.

Thus… Shiro’s mind was currently running at full speed to think of a reason…… to think of an [excuse].

And then, when Shiro finally found an excuse, she spoke it choppily.

“…… Nii…… if I fall in love…… I don’t know…… what I’d do……”

“Sh-Shiro… Are you doubting your brother’s iron will!?”

Sora asserted his grief, as he took sufficient pride in his ability to maintain self-control.

But —– for Miko, who had the Werebeasts’ ability to exceed standard practices, and even look into the changes in another’s heart……

Unlike Sora, she seemed to better understand the changes in Shiro’s emotions. Miko began to giggle.

“—– Alright, why don’t you try it on me?”

“Miko-sama?”

Miko’s gaze seemed as if she had just seen something amusing. She continued speaking.

“I, too, do not understand the feelings of love, so this should not be a problem, right?”

But Shiro was still on high alert, so she asked Plum, “…… can it …… be undone?”

“Eh? It-It can! No problems at all!”

“Hahaha, feel at ease. The type I like is different from that.”

Shiro and Miko seemed to mutually understand the meaning behind their words, and Sora was the only one who could not keep up with what their conversation.

“…… Do you guys know what those two are talking about?”

“My deepest apologies, Master, I do not.”

“……? Sorry, I wasn’t listening then, des.”

Jibril did not get the reasons behind it.

And it was naturally impossible for Izuna, who was already yawning, to know what was going on.

Ignoring the three of them, Miko stood up… and took a step.

Then she silently and immediately appeared in front of Plum.

“Come on, weren’t you going to try it out on me?”

“Y-Yes. Then, Sora-sama, and everyone…”

Plum had instantly flinched in reaction to Miko’s actions, but she immediately pulled herself together, and spread her wings while she spoke.

“When lacking the supply of blood, this magic cannot be used too many times, so please pay attention!!”

Complex patterns emerged in Plum’s eyes, and concurrently, a breeze blew within the room.

Plum’s wings looked like they were woven from the night. The light circles that appeared had completely different geometrical patterns than Jibril’s... With irregular vibrations and uncountable red lines scuttling, the room was dyed red.

The irregular streaks of red looked like veins. They gradually corroded until they reached Plum’s right hand.

That hand… began to move again, slowly and complexly.

Feeling the elemental particles… the compilation of techniques turned into a smell of magic. The ears of Izuna and Miko had subtle reactions.

Nonetheless, the magic was completely undetectable by Imanity… so Sora and Shiro did not feel a thing.

The only one who could correctly identify the magic, and even see through the meaning of the compilation of techniques was Jibril, but…

“…What…… it can’t be, can it?”

From her tone, it seemed that she was surprised.

After a few seconds… Plum slowly brought her palm to Miko.

…In a flash.

It sounded as if things were exploding, and the space surrounding Miko gave of a red glow, as if a whirlpool was scattering in all directions.

………… Um?

“…… What? Was the magic carried out well?”

Miko did not look to feel any changes to herself.

But Plum smiled in fatigue and said, “Right! After this would be… Sora-sama, please…!”

“Rub Miko-sama’s chest～～!”

“……Ah?”

Sora and Miko exclaimed at the same time.

“After this [command] —– the spell will be…… complete!”

Plum did not seem to notice the implications, and was still speaking while filled with confidence. In a flash, Sora and Shiro exchanged glances.

Seeing Shiro nod in agreement, Sora…

“Ah～Then Miko-sama, can I?”

“…… Well, I agreed to try it out….. But I’m very unhappy that none of this was stated in advance.”

Miko looked reluctant, and she sighed while swaying her chest away.

“…… If it doesn’t feel good…… I would lose face……”

Sora said that, then with fear and trepidation, he covered Miko’s breast with a hand.

Then, looking determined… he applied some pressure.

… Sora almost let out a gasp of admiration towards the elasticity of it bouncing forward then sinking back.

While Sora felt touched by the feeling of something different than Steph’s…

“Oooo…?”

Miko, who was originally frowning with displeasure……

…felt as if something in her body had been unleashed. Her expression… changed.

Following which, she slowly shifted her gazed towards Sora…

Intoxicated…

She said, “Wh-What is this? This feeling that makes all the hair on my body stand on edge…… This sickening barf-worthy smile, from being in a bad mood then now with a fire burning inside… Oh-Oh right, is this —— is this what [love] is!?"

"It can't be～～! That really hurts my feelings!"

… Miko was looking into the disgusting thing's eyes when she spoke, and Sora immediately shouted back in response.

Still, Miko continued speaking as though she had not heard Sora's yells.

"Th-This is probably love. It's obviously impossible, but I can assert that I've [fallen] for Sora, and so…… this nauseating feeling is called love…… what a wonderful world we're in."

"…I say, Plum, haven't you failed?"

No matter how you'd look at it, it's a mistake. Sora's mouth twitched uncontrollably.

But Plum still stood tall and replied confidently.

"Hahaha, please listen to my explanation…… This is the main point."

—— As if speaking of the Dhampirs' only technology, her usually misfortunate face was presently gleaming with shining eyes.

"[Love Magic (plug-in)] —— although there were rumors of it in past and present, no one has ever implemented it…"

"…… Is that so? Jibril."

Love potions and love magic… were frequently used in the plot of fantasy stories.

"…Yeah, although I'm reluctant to admit it, we have no leads on the principles of love magic."

Jibril had difficulty concealing her amazed face when she spoke.

Despite her reluctance to look, she was still nodding in recognition of Plum's great undertaking.

"To interfere with the emotions of love is something that practitioners of magic were never able to define the ambiguous key constituents to. From my knowledge, this magic is something even the Elves have yet to achieve……"

Though they were prominent in their illusionary magic spells, the Dhampirs were still only ranked in twelfth place.

The seventh ranked can practically be addressed as a magic spell itself. They were a synonym to complex technique compilations (magic).

It was something the Elves could not accomplish, but Plum could. Despite this, she still nodded her head in agreement.

“Yes, the difficulty lies in defining [feelings of love] because it’s never fixed —— as everyone has a different definition.”

Plum was happily flapping her tiny wings while she spoke.

She had a triumphant look and straightened her chest before she went on with her speech.

“When [the uncertainty factor is impossible to be set], no matter what spell is cast, it’d be meaningless. That is why what the world terms as the spell of [Love Magic (plug-in)] is at most just a cause of [estrus magic]… but!”

“Ah, wait a second, Plum, I’m more interested in [estrus magic]…”

But Plum ignored Sora’s concern and was standing so proud and tall that it looked as if she was about to bend backwards. “We Dhampirs have finally succeeded in this!”

“…………”

Then she began her story…

About something the Elves would never be able to reach……

…And the truth —— about the magic that would even make a Flügel marvel at.

“Sure it’s uncertain, but we can just set it as something. Since everyone has a different feeling when in [love], then let that definition be arbitrarily be decided by us!”

—— *What kind of preposterous reasoning is that?*

Having played games which often have the appearance of love magic, Sora had never felt such a strong sense of violation till today.

Sora glanced towards Miko… Miko’s gaze looked as if she was staring at garbage when directed at Sora.

“…… No, but this should not be a state where she’s in love with me, right?”

Sora rolled his eyes and murmured.

“No, if Miko-sama identifies such a feeling as [love], then that *is* [love]! After all… love is just a misconception!!”

Plum was filled with confidence.

Disguises and illusions… this was what was so categorically asserted by the race who is the most adept at the manipulation of one’s spirit and cognition.

“…… Shiro, I now feel a totally unprecedented disappointment towards the feeling of love.”

“…… Love…… what is it……”

In spite of the philosophical contemplation of the problem at hand by the siblings, Plum grew even more excited as she spoke.

“Alright, Sora-sama, Miko-sama must have identified [disgust] as the feeling of love! Now, if you strike while the iron is hot, and tell her the most disgusting of disgusting lines you have!”

Being called disgusting time and again, although Sora had many things to say… he temporarily swallowed his words.

“Ah…… [I really want to lick Miko]……”

Upon hearing the random line that Sora had just thought of, Miko’s reaction was… that she could not retreat.

“Ahhh…… you can’t, Sora. You can’t! If you talk like that… wouldn’t that make me fall for you even harder ♥”

“Hey! Plum!! Aren’t her words totally inconsistent with her attitude!? She looks to be incredibly disgusted at me!! No, I should say instead that those eyes are obviously telling me to [go to hell]!!”

Sora was gleaming with tears. He looked like he wanted to grab Plum and scream into her chest.

However, Plum still shook her head with immense pride in herself while she spoke.

“That is Miko-sama’s form of love. It turned into such a thing, isn’t that terrific?”

“It’s too great, so hurry up and cancel it! My spirit is on the verge of collapsing!”

… This can’t be right. Love Magic (plug-in) should not be as such……

——————…………

“Ahhh, such an interesting experience…… Living for such a long time has its perks.”

With the spell broken, Miko was delighted and laughing out loud.

Sora moved to the side — in an effort to prevent others from seeing how hurt his heart was — then he spoke to Plum.

“So as it turns out, now I know your [countermeasure for victory]. Yet, why do you not just use this by yourself?”

With such a means to make another fall in love unconditionally, the Dhampirs should be able to manage this by themselves, right?

But, Plum dropped her shoulders and replied dejectedly.

“Because the Dhampirs’ last male is still a child…… and the queen requested for a [prince]…”

Plum drew a circle with her hand, and something seemingly magical emerged. She continued her speech.

“This magic is an illusion that feigns one’s cognition…… it works best when used with a male with reproductive capabilities.”

—— At that moment, Shiro was still wordlessly pulling at the hem of Sora’s shirt. She passed her phone to him.

Sora glanced at the words typed onto the phone…

“…… Un…… [That doesn’t sound like Nii has to do it]. Well said.”

—— Hearing Sora’s words, Miko and Izuna’s ears moved.

“Plum, let me ask you, can the queen’s game be challenged by multiple people at once?”

“Eh? Ah, it can. It should be possible…… because the interference spell with the queen’s dream will become large scale, so it may result in problems…… but, conversely, why can’t Sora-sama just challenge the game by himself?”

“Sorry to say this, but since [plug-in] is our final measure, and we do intend to issue the challenge, a frontal attack should be launched. We must first raise our chances of victory.”

“The swindler still has the cheek to say that……”

“Hey hey, why is Miko-sama saying something I cannot make heads or tails of… In [plug-in], frauds are specified to win. It’d be different if the cheat to pull was to [ensure that we have a trick if we are caught cheating to prevent a loss], right?”

—— Miko and the rest did not understand, but in Sora and Shiro’s original world…

Though they use psychological warfare and pull cheats, they kept a consistent principle to never use [plug-ins].

“Games in particular require one to exhaust all means of winning in the range of the rules. When the fundamental rules are ignored, it cannot be called a game. It’s fine to make use of a game’s bug, or an OP[9] character, as long as it is [officially recognized] that it can be used for the sake of an unscrupulous victory… But using a means that defies the rules is absolutely out of the question.”

After that, Sora nodded and ended his topic.

At that instant, Sora suddenly… shifted his line of sight to Miko, and nodded again.

"—— I say, Miko-sama, can… you swim?"

To this question, Miko shook her head in response.

"… Since you don't know how to swim, you can just walk about in the water, somehow?"

"As long as Miko-sama agrees, I will agree to her request —— to advance to Oceando."

"…… Un, that makes sense. The remuneration is not bad, and it will be a [sure-win]."

"R-Really!?"

"…Miko-sama, among the people you know, aren't there any suitable candidates?"

Upon hearing this question, Miko stopped for a while to think about it.

And then, she stopped her mouth from speaking by covering it with her hand.

But after thinking of how Sora's expression would change, Miko concealed her smile while she spoke.

"—— [Hatsuse Ino], that man should have about [t-h-i-r-t-y wives], yo."

Part 6

Elchea's King City, the King's bedroom.

Steph was greedily enjoying a comfortable sleep she had long been missing. She wandered about in her dream…

"Old man～～ hear me when I say this! I damn you to hell!!"

Suddenly, sounds of explosions shook the city, and further muffled explosions roared through. Steph rolled off the bed.

"Wh-What happened!?"

Steph cried in pain for she had just bumped her head, but once she realized what she had just heard… the sound she just made was more of a scream. Steph even forgot that she was still in pajamas. She lifted her quilt, and immediately ran towards the direction of the sound —— which was the direction of the main conference room. She practically flew out the room.

Right on cue, it looked as if the door to the main conference room had been kicked down. What Steph, who was frantically rushing over, saw was…

The cause of the earlier explosion —— should be…… no, it definitely was —— none other than Jibril.

Perhaps it was because of the sound of an explosion…

"H-How did this horror come about……"

Hatsuse Ino, who was substituting for Steph in a game, and his opponent —— who was probably one of the feudal lords —— were there. Their cards were fluttering in the air with a large number of documents. Smoke filled the main conference room, and one of the walls was utterly destroyed. The source which caused this heaven-and-earth surprise seemed to have noticed Steph. "Iyaa, Dora-chan, hi. Master commanded for his space to be transferred right now to Elchea, but because there were too many people, I had to open a slightly larger hole in this space… Are you okay?"

… Actually, I might not be okay?

But compared to this… Steph suddenly started tearing up as she stared on.

The smoke was torn through. With great momentum, Sora closed in on Ino with ground-piercing paces, and began to yell at him.

"Defendant Hatsuse Ino! Not only are you a Riajuu, you've even taken more than a single maiden as your wife! I have simply tried this great sin through my brain, and based on my prejudiced decision alone, your verdict is fully and absolutely guilty, and you are henceforth sentenced to death! By the laws of the galaxy, I will now obliterate you into the dust of the universe, gaaaahhhhh!!!"

"…… Ah…… Sora-dono, the mass of what I have to say to you has piled up all the way to the sky."

When faced with the king who had just returned after roaming around for half a month… and came back as a mad king…

Ino looked like he was suppressing the fire of his anger, but…

Izuna unexpectedly appeared from behind Sora's back. Her words made Ino immediately freeze in his place.

"…… grandpa…… are you a [sex-craving monster], des?"

"EH!? Izuna, where did you learn such words….!"

Conversely, as she may not have understood the meaning of the words, Izuna tilted her head to a side and widened her eyes.

"…… That's how Sora calls grandpa, des."

"Oi! You damn monkey!! Not only had you thrown a mountain of work onto others, you even instilled strange vocabulary to my granddaughter!?"

Ino could not help but reveal his true nature, and broke the table with an angry roar.

But Sora was literally looking up towards the sky, and waved his hand then pointed to Ino's face.

"Ah! Look, Izuna! This is the face of a great sinner whose immoral thoughts were just exposed. Ugly, isn't it?"

Izuna had a look of defeat on her face.

"…… Grandpa, quit making a scene, des."

"Wha ———— No, no, it's not like that, Izuna! Grandpa is honestly in love with these girls……"

"Ah～ Ahh～ Shut up, shut up, you lower bodied slave! Don't make excuses, and just get ready to die —— aarrgh!!"

"…… Nii…… noisy……" Shiro said this while being carried on Sora's back.

Holding his neck with her arms, the then noisy Sora was subtly forced to shut his mouth.

—— And then, when the smoke began to disperse ……

"Hahaha, it sure is a ruckus every time……"

With a voice like the ringing of bells, her footsteps were heard as she stepped to the floor… A golden fox had appeared.

“Wha—— Mi-Miko-sama!?” Seeing her figure, Ino instantly lay prostrate to greet her.

Miko said, “Hatsuse Ino… We are now to [have everyone together] and advance to Oceando.”

With her crisp and pleasant voice, she continued on.

“On the way there, please take your time to elaborate on your romantic nature. I take it there are no issues?”

“Mi-Miko-sama…… Even Miko-sama is looking at me like that…”

Ignoring that Ino was about to wet the ground with his tears, Miko chose to lower her voice and repeat herself…

“… There are no issues?”

… Such a question.

… Ino raised his head to observe his surroundings. Although he did not fully understand everything… he could only give this reply.

“…… As you wish, please leave it to me.”

“——……”

Steph could not keep up with what was happening, and just innocently stood by the front of the door.

“Hey, Steph, you look quite well. We haven’t seen each other in two weeks, yeah?”

—— Sora’s tone relaxed when he spoke, maybe because he finally noticed her there.

Looking at his face… the countless emotions in Steph’s chest were like waves surging forth.

Anger, blame, accountability, interrogation…

But compared to all of those, seeing Sora’s face after such a long time… Her vision went blur.

The many lines she had originally decided to say when she met Sora had already flown beyond the topmost clouds.

Steph closed both eyes tightly, and deliberately did not wipe away the tears emerging in her eyes.

She was not thinking about what the feeling the tears were stemming from, but just letting her emotions out before she spoke…

“Oh, Elchea’s policies have already been implemented to such a state, ah… Was it under Hatsuse Ino’s directive?”

“It was Steph. She left Ino with only the restrictions and recommendations of the job.”

“……Eh?”

—– Not speaking.

Hearing Miko and Sora converse, she made that sound as she fell into a blank stare.

Steph widened her eyes in surprise at Sora’s unexpected answer. Miko, on the other hand, smiled as she intuitively knew what was going on.

“—– So that’s what happened. After unveiling your slogan that a federation would be constructed, the two [rulers] went to leisurely stay in the Eastern Union, and caused such a situation…… Such a devious man you are.”

Miko stated this boldly, but Sora smiled all the same when replying.

“Professional issues should be handled by professionals… Politics is something Steph can handle with absolutely no problems.”

“…… Adding on the fact that [you two were not present] is even more of a blow.”

“Yeah, because we were worried that other countries might take the opportunity to interfere with stately affairs.”

—– Ino and Steph were shocked back from their frozen states when they heard that statement.

However, it was Shiro who continued the speech while she looked over several documents.

“…… [when Nii and Shiro are absent]…… no matter how you think of it…… [it’s a trap]……”

Then… she continued speaking.

“…… only an idiot……. would jump straight into such a trap.”

“That crowd of idiots was comparing you against the game matches they usually have with Shiro and I… But Steph had continuously learnt from her defeats, so they didn’t have even a 10,000 to 1 chance of defeating her. That’s why we could feel at ease when we focused our efforts on the Eastern Union ♪”

Steph and Ino were at a loss for words. They stood stunned and speechless.

But Sora’s expression turned more serious than ever.

“But that’s too many, right, Steph? Why did you accept all those challenges?”

—— Hearing those words made Steph froze in that moment.

In other words…… if that really was true… then why did I accept all of those challenges?

The contents of the game and the choice of whether to accept it were all to be decided by the party who was challenged.

Why did I force myself to be so busy…

Steph’s eyes were wide open while she questioned herself, but Sora continued with his next sentence……

“Steph… although I rely greatly on you, you don’t have to push yourself too hard, and also… how do I put this.”

Sora was scratching his head and slightly embarrassed when he spoke.

“Thank you.”

—— The very line she wanted to hear.

She had worked so desperately to her current state just for him to think that way.

When her mind began to understand the meaning behind her falling tears, she felt her temperature rise… and her cheeks flushed concurrently…

“N-No…… It’s because you guys are such an unfathomable mystery so I’m just trying to deal with all the work as fast as I can… That’s all there is to it!”

Steph spoke in stammers as Sora was moving closer to her.

The rate of her heartbeat was increasing endlessly.

Sora said, “Then, Steph, I’m sorry to trouble you when you’re already so tired. As Miko-sama said, we have to advance to the capital of the Sirens.”

“Eh? Ah, ok…… th-then what?”

Steph avoided his line of sight.

But Sora was glancing in a different direction.

Over there was a black girl with an appearance of great misfortune on her face she never seen before.

“The Sirens and the Dhampirs are about to go extinct, so we’re going to save them, or rather I’d say…”

Then, he resumed his usual deemphasized tone when speaking.

“We’re going to get the resources and territories… which are what we are fatally lacking to construct a federation with the Eastern Union.”

Hearing Sora’s declaration, Steph’s eyes felt slightly hot.

Indeed…

Sure enough… this man was thinking for the sake of all of Elchea…

It was Shiro’s turn to close in on her.

“…… Steph…… Do you know how to sew……?”

“—— What?”

“To put it simply, we want to go to the beach. Can you please make a swimsuit for everyone? We’ll pass the designs to you.”

—— In other words, more work.

With a smile on her face, Steph fainted without speaking a word——……

Chapter 2 - Strategist/The Sun

Part 1

- The sea.

When it comes to vacation spots, they could probably be divided into two main categories, mountain regions and areas close to seas or oceans.

During summer, many people will instinctively flock to these places, like moths gathering at a lamp.

- To be honest, the stubborn grains of sand that refuse to get off the body, one's skin being exposed to the sun for long periods of time, such that it brings pain and discomfort to the body, while the sea wind corrodes one's hair every second; thinking about it, it's hard to understand why exactly people come to places like these.

But – a hateful place like this, once certain conditions change, it's an entirely different matter.

"- Phew… how blissful."

Under a parasol that looked like a Japanese oil-paper umbrella, Sora lay on a grass-woven bed, with a glass in his hand.

At both sides of Sora, were multiple Werebeasts that appeared to be Miko's followers who were fanning him with giant leaves.

Their hanten[10] that were spread open at the chest area – which apparently was the preferred swimsuit of the Eastern Union – revealed their breasts, and their skin revealed underneath the cloth that covered only the lower half of the body, in comparison with their ears and tails covered in animal fur, appeared even more flashy and attractive than the sun itself.

Sora shook the cup in his hand, and thought – This is Heaven.

"…Sora-san, to think that you can remain unfazed under this sort of heat… you must be enjoying yourself."

"Yeah! Isn't this all because of Jibril's secret sunblock concocted from light spirits? Moving on –"[11]

Ino spoke calmly, while Sora replied with a hint of suspicion in his voice without even turning around:

"Old man, I'm not intentionally looking at you, but you aren't wearing just a loincloth again, right?"

"Sora-san, what you just said was pretty strange… besides loincloths; do men have any other clothing choices when it comes to water-related activities?"

As Sora had predicted – wearing only a loincloth – a muscular old man replied while tilting his head.

Sora sighed in frustration, then spoke while pointing at himself:

“Let me tell you something old man, look at me, what do you think?”

“- Sora-san, you have that sort of fetish?”

“Are you senile!? Old man~~!! Shorts and a shirt! This is standard swimwear as well!”

Sora stood up and backed down a few steps, then yelled after hearing the reply filled with disgust.

Ino shook his head helplessly.

“You don’t wish for other people to see your frail body, but that's fine, Sora-san, since it’s plain manners to cover up one’s embarrassing spots.”

“I just don’t want to become a muscular guy like you! Also, don’t call me frail! Since the FPS match I had against Izuna, I realized that stamina is important as well, I may not look like it, but I have been training!”

Sora yelled, choked slightly, then lay down again.

- He was surprised himself as he could only do fifty push-ups and sit-ups each, but he didn’t need to say that.

“…Let’s change the subject, aren’t they done yet?”

“Girls take a long time to change you know, Sora-san – pardon me, haven’t you heard?”

“It’s hard talking to Old Man Muscles, can’t you detect my sarcasm!? Can’t you!?”

Sora yelled coldly, then looked behind him.

“Hey, Shiro, you’re not done yet?”

“…Mm, I need… a bit more time…”

Behind Sora – Shiro’s reply drifted from the shade behind a clump of trees.

Something that sounded like clothing scraping about could be heard, it seemed that she was having trouble wearing her clothes by herself.

“Wouldn’t it be fine if she’d changed with the other girls in the changing room?”

“Yes, that was what I suggested, after which I was chased out by someone… and that someone was you!”

Sora and Shiro cannot be apart, not even when changing clothes.

That was an unspoken fact, so Sora as usual, naturally, automatically, attempted to enter the female changing room with Shiro –

But then he was chased out, which resulted in the current situation.

“Trying to peek at Miko-sama naked, even if that sort of thing were to be permitted by God (Tet), I would still refuse!”

“Miko-san already said she doesn’t mind -!”

Sora felt only remorse at retreating from the changing room only due to a menacing glare from a loincloth-wearing muscular old man.

- Now let’s think of a way to cheat Ino, and sneak into the changing room.

Just as Sora began to formulate his master plan –

“…I’m done, des.”

“Oh... it’s Izuna indeed, you look cute no matter what you wear.”

- Hearing the voice of a young girl, Ino suddenly took on the voice of a compassionate grandfather and turned around.

Upon seeing Izuna who was the earliest to finish changing, Ino sighed in relief.

“I heard the swimsuit was suggested by Sora-san – I initially thought it would be some immoral clothing.”

“You’re too shallow, old man, first! It’s common sense that young girls have to wear 「School swimsuits」!”

Izuna waved her large tail around while stepping lightly on the beach.

That swimsuit was – from Sora’s world… an old-fashioned school swimsuit.

Of course, that was something that didn’t exist in this world.

To elaborate further, even the Eastern Union didn’t possess a chemical fiber like polyester.

But – school swimsuits were originally woven with silk before the Second World War.

So this was a perfectly woven product created by Steph, closely following the detailed instructions listed on Sora’s tablet.

Steph – you’ve really outdone yourself.

"…But it really doesn't reveal a lot of skin."

"Let me say this again, you're too shallow, old man. Without the seasoning of culture, how could this be considered romantic!?"

- Yes, on top of the school swimsuit Izuna was wearing, she also had on a long-sleeved kimono resembling a hanten not unlike what the Werebeasts around her were wearing.

Kemonomimi, young girls, school swimsuits, not to mention the seasoning of the Eastern Union's culture -!

- This is – - Sora's - 「Solution」…

Izuna walked in front of Sora, then as though wanting to see how she looked like from behind, twirled around in a circle.

"Is this alright, des?"

"It's perfect… you were almost criminally cute in the first place, but now you could be classified as a national treasure."

Looking at Sora who had a smile of a normal,cheerful teenager on his face and was giving a thumbs-up of approval, Ino –

"...I don't really understand but, I give my sincerest approval of this since you didn't let my granddaughter wear any immoral clothing."

- spoke.

"U, um… I'm done changing."

"Oh, Steph, you really did a great job –"

Hearing Steph's embarrassed voice, Sora turned around to thank her – but froze momentarily instead.

Steph's cheeks were bright red, just like the impression her normal clothes left on others, the swimsuit she was wearing was a modified two-piece with added ruffles and a belt made from semi-transparent material, and her eyes continually darted from side to side.

From what Sora knew, Elchea shouldn't have possessed that sort of 「Swimsuit」.

Speaking of Elchea's swimsuits there was only – that.

Like 17th-century Eastern Europe, their swimsuits were full-bodied female lingerie and looked old-fashioned, which was the only swimsuit Elchea possessed.

Because of that, Sora had to plead Steph to make a new swimsuit.

From her expression, she had probably selected a swimsuit she liked from Sora and Shiro's catalogue as well.

But the reason why Sora froze on the spot wasn't the swimsuit.

The real reason was because he saw 「That」 which was large enough to the point of almost bursting from the swimsuit – and the numbers endlessly flashing in his brain made him freeze.

"- I, impossible! Eighty-nine, fifty-eight, eighty-nine… the power levels are at five hundred thousand -!?"

"You – how did you know – No! What are you talking about!!"

The power level scanner within his head calculated Steph's stunningly high 「Bust measurements」, making Sora tremor uncontrollably.

Things like this existed!

Did I miss it since the steam was too dense earlier!?

"…Ugh, ugh… to think that a mere Steph would have such high standards -!"

"Eh, ah! R, really? I, it's nothing…"

Steph wiggled nervously, appearing rather glad with herself.

Sora was about to say something else to her, but –

"I apologize, Master, because it took a long time to 「Weave」 this into a fashion of your preference."

"Haha, it's fine, making men wait is a custom of a good woman as well!"

Hearing the two voices, everyone turned around at once – suddenly, Sora's power level scanner exploded and flew away.

Sora and Ino didn't have the time to think, instead following their instincts, both of them kneeled on the floor in a worshipping fashion, as though it was obligatory for them to do so.

What they saw when they turned around was – two goddesses.

The two goddesses – one of them was Jibril.

Her hair that was changing colors seemingly endlessly according to the rays of light shooting down from the sky was waving around in the sea-wind and sun, appeared even more beautiful and dazzling.

That structural beauty almost at the point of perfection would make any sculptor's heart melt upon first sight.

And that artwork of a body, was wearing the swimsuit Sora had recommended.

Jibril normally wore extremely revealing clothes as well, so Sora had selected a swimsuit resembling a coverall with the abdominal area woven with silk.

She had used a large female shawl as a sort of belt wrapped around her waist, and her faintly glowing wings protruded from it.

The halo spinning around on her head, added a sort of holy aura to her.

Her indisputable beauty would unquestionably convince others that she was a goddess descended from the heavens.

The two goddesses – the second one was Miko.

Her golden hair, ears, tail and snow-white skin, under the bright glow of the sun, was exactly like – a Buddha.

With her subtle body curves, if Jibril was considered an extreme beauty – then she would be a supreme one.

Her delicate skin that was usually hidden under a kimono was now completely coated with a swimsuit resembling another hanten.

But the swimsuit was spread out like a butterfly in the night, revealing her pink and tender shoulders, making her appear unbelievably beautiful.

Her golden hair and twin tails would shake as she stepped along the beach, along with the flirtatious smile on her face would convince anyone that an immortal, godlike fox demon – a heavenly fox presiding over one actually exists.

The two men still kneeling on the ground, had tears flowing down their cheeks.

They were praying to an unknown existence for reasons they themselves did not know.

“…Hatsuse Ino, has finally realized why he lives and exists upon this earth - !”

“Oh, dear god! I don’t know where you are, nor who you are, but you are a God of exceptional tastes for creating Jibril and Miko upon this earth – ah, please take me in as your disciple…”

- The creation of a religion.

Steph and Izuna witnessed this precious moment, however –

“- Well, it’s true that something like this would happen when compared to them… but isn’t the way we're being treated a bit too far off?"

"…? Did they get sand in their eyes, des?"

Looking at the two men who were still kneeling in complete reverence, Izuna tilted her head in confusion.

"Ah, Master, I am not worthy of such praise, please get up!!"

"Mm, rise, how about you lift up your heads, and properly enjoy the privilege of witnessing me in a swimsuit?"

Jibril immediately knelt and began kowtowing upon seeing Sora's actions, while Miko laughed aloud instead.

Hearing the words spoken by the two women, Sora and Ino stood up in trepidation.

Again setting their eyes upon the two's sacred figures, Sora and Ino looked up to the sky at once.

"…I feel like I've enjoyed myself immensely already."

"…Yes, I feel accomplished as well."

"..Let's go back."

"…It's rare that we see eye-to-eye, Sora-san."

- Both of them were becoming philosophical.

The two that were usually like fire and water, at that point, didn't have any barriers between them, and the gap between races had been bridged.

They were instead both men, looking up at the same sky, carrying the same thoughts within themselves, sympathetic towards each other.

- Why does everyone have to fight amongst each other?

The world is such a beautiful place –

"No, please wait! Why did we come here in the first place?"

Steph yelled at the two men who were still undergoing revelations in the horizon.

- Eh?

"…Why is that?"

"Please allow me to answer, Master, I believe we were here to pay a visit to the capital of the

Seirenes.”

…Ah, right, Sora finally remembered.

- Yes, exactly as Jibril had said, they hadn’t come here to play in the ocean.

It was Plum who had said that the Seirens would send a boat to fetch them, which was why they came.

Because the capital of the Seirens – 「Oceando」 was at the bottom of the sea.

Jibril had never been there and she couldn’t see it as well, so she couldn’t teleport them there.

So, according to their earlier arrangement, Plum would guide them from here, but –

“Hmm? What happened to Plum who said she’d guide us earlier?”

“I, I’m here…”

“Whoa!?”

A soft voice drifted up from near his feet, making Sora jump in surprise.

He didn’t know when it had appeared, but a pair of eyes looked up at him from a wooden crate which presence he couldn’t detect until earlier next to his legs.

“…Eh, is this Plum? What are you doing, this is the sea, the sea you know.”

“D, don’t be so inconsiderate… t, this is already my limit!” Plum answered. Patterns began appearing around her not unlike those when she used magic – and tears appeared in her eyes.

“Master, sunlight is fatal to the Dhampir, even when she’s hiding in the box, she still needs to avert the rays of the sun –“

Hearing Jibril’s words, Sora recalled the 「Disease」.

Since it was transmitted through blood-sucking, it would mean that the Dhampir themselves wouldn’t be able to see the sun.

“…Oceande only sends their 「Reception Boat」 at night! Why did we have to come during the day…”

- That’s right.

She had said earlier, the boat would only come after sunset.

Plum complained in frustration, why had they come in the daytime which was like a hellish frying pan to her.

“No, but this is the sea, you want me to skip the swimsuits in a situation like this, are you for real?”

- If not for Jibril’s secret 「Sunblock」, Sora wouldn’t have come in the day either.

“Oh yeah, Jibril, is the sunblock useless on Plum?”

“Sadly, Master, for the Dhampir, 「Being hit by sunlight」 is the cause of death.”

Jibril stated that there was no possible solution, but was corrected by Plum.

“Ah, no… it’s fine if an even stronger spell is cast… but it would use up too much energy.”

They remembered how exhausted she had looked when she had first came to Sora’s and everyone else’s residence.

Which means, for her to walk around unfazed under a blazing sun like this, she would probably end up in that state again.

“Um, about that… because of the quality of the Seirens’ blood, well, I’m unable to use too much of my strength… so…”

Suddenly, a sweet smile appeared on Plum’s face.

“Again! As long as you let me lick Shiro-sama’s feet, I can successfully use magic ~ ehehe ~ ☆”

“Absolutely not, you’d better stay quietly in that box.”

With her suggestion immediately rejected, Plum could only shut the box again while sighing.

“…Hey, considering that they’re ranked twelfth place, aren’t the Dhampir a bit too weak?”

- Even when comparing with the preset abilities of the vampires back in his world, Sora still thought this way.

“The ability of the Dhampir corresponds with the blood that they have consumed – the thicker the soul essence, the stronger their power.”

Jibril replied.

“If combined with something that has a high affinity with confusion or concealing magic – like let’s say, the blood of an Elf, 「Assassins」 that are extremely hard to deal with would be birthed, and those actually do pose a large threat on the battlefield.”

…So that’s how it is, Sora remembered the first night.

It was a moment of carelessness, but even Jibril was tricked by her, and now –

“- Now it’s been reduced to this…”

Looking down at the box at his feet, Sora spoke with his eyes half open.

It was obvious that she was still trembling within the box, with more tears in her eyes.

"- I was thinking since earlier, the Elves and the Flügel, have only a one-rank difference, so wouldn't your strength be about the same? She can drink the blood of an Elf, but she would evaporate upon drinking Jibril's blood right?"

Sora asked while pointing to the wooden box at his feet, while Jibril replied:

"Yes, because on the rankings there is a 「Segmentation」."

"Segmentation?"

"Essentially speaking, those below the seventh rank are 「Living Beings」, while those above are classified as 「Life」."

"…Which means?"

"Those that possess a physical body of flesh, and use typical methods of reproduction are commonly classified as 「Living Beings」, which end at the Elves that are ranked seventh; while those above possess the strength of will or concept, which you could think of those as 「Life」."

- Mm, so essentially speaking –

That was a watershed incomprehensible using common sense, was how Sora interpreted it.

"Also, the ones ranked just above Jibril – are the Gigants right? What's the difference in strength between you and that race?"

"…Let me think, for a standard Gigant, it would be too inadequate to kill it with the strength of just one, so more realistically speaking, I think I'd need five other companions – eh? Do you have plans of hunting one?"

"No, I don't, so stop looking so excited!"

This person over here with a disappointed expression on her face – could single-handedly take down an Elf at the top of those classified as 「Living Beings」.

But she needed the strength of six to take down a Gigant ranked in the fifth position.

- It was a miracle that those below the seventh survived the 「Great War」.

Especially the Imanity, or should I say us – ah, right.

"Speaking of us… hey~! Shiro, are you still not done?"

Suddenly, Sora realized a long period of time had passed, so he directed his question to the shrubbery behind him.

“…Mm.”

Reacting to Sora’s voice, Shiro stuck her head out from behind a tree.

She looked hesitant as though she didn’t dare to come out.

“What is it? Shiro, do you still hate the sunlight? If you’re uncomfortable you don’t have to force yourself!”

Although she had Jibril’s special sunblock on, Shiro still hated the sunlight.

Not to mention Shiro’s hatred of it was even greater than Sora’s, which of course Sora knew – in response to Sora that cared for her, Shiro –

Shaking her head continually, although still hesitant, she still slowly walked out from behind the trees.

“…Oh~ how beautiful.”

“Ah, isn’t this cute?”

“…Shiro, you’re really pretty, des.”

Ino, Miko and Izuna had expressed their own opinions – but Sora froze yet again instead.

The one standing there was unquestionably his dear sister.

- That’s how it was supposed to be, but –

“-…Eh?”

The one that was nervously walking out was - 「A gemstone-like young girl」.

Her long hair that was already as white as snow usually, was tied up at the back of her head after careful preening.

Under the rays of the sun her hair wasn’t like snow anymore – but was more like a crystal or a diamond.

The skin that was revealed between her white bikini and red cap, was as though to compliment her beautiful hair or ruby-like eyes –

“…Nii…?”

- Just like her cheeks, that flushed slightly red as well.

“-Eh? Strange? Eh?”

The sense of violation from looking so dreamily at his 「Sister」, made Sora mumble questions unconsciously.

While those mumblings made Shiro appear somewhat uneasy.

“…So it really…doesn’t look good…?”

Upon seeing Shiro say this while looking down and preparing to retreat again into the trees, Sora appeared to return to normal again.

He hurriedly – he himself questioned as to why he was being so panicky – shook his head forcefully.

“N, no! No!! I was just surprised since Shiro’s so beautiful – no, wait, Shiro is a completely flawless beauty, this your brother knew since long ago! You know that… right? Eh?”

Sora tilted his head, curious as to why he was so shocked earlier.

Jibril and Steph who were beside him looked immersed in her beauty as well.

- Shiro looked down in embarrassment.

As her heart rate increased, her expression hinted at something else – a tiny, appeased smile.

“…Really? That’s… good…”

…

“Master really is worthy of his title… isn’t this an unbelievably precious piece of eye candy?”

“No, that’s not how it is, it’s normal to react to cute things ahhhh.”

Jibril appeared refreshed, with her skin pale and smooth… let out a breath of air.

Steph wrapped her hands around her head, appearing to be undergoing some sort of internal conflict.

“…Nii…?”

“Oh, hmm? Mm, yes, you look great! You, my sister, are my greatest pride after all!"

Shiro walked closer to Sora, which was when Sora returned to his normal self.

Being patted on the head by Sora, Shiro nodded her head as though finally appeased.

“-Uh, right, Plum, can you give us an estimate of when the 「Reception Boat」 will arrive?”

Sora felt slightly awkward, and remembering his original aim, questioned Plum.

Hearing Sora’s words, everyone at once – looked over at Plum.

Plum revealed her face slightly from within the box, and replied:

“Um, about midnight or so –“

“-Oh, we have quite a lot of time left.”

Plum replied in a defeated voice:

“That’s why we didn’t need to come so early… waaaahhhh.”

After finishing her sentence – maybe because the sunlight was too uncomfortable – Plum closed the box again.

“It’s fine, what difference does this make?”

Miko spoke casually, and undetected by everyone else, she had already lay down on the grass bed Sora was using earlier, allowing her followers to fan her with the giant leaves, she gave an elegant reply.

“Just take this as a well-deserved vacation, relax and wait for the boat, after all one always needs a break in life right?”

Sora and Shiro scratched their heads while smiling bitterly, and exchanged a knowing glance.

Shiro nodded her head.

“Thinking closely, this is the first time Shiro and I have been to the seaside.”

Sora’s eyes swept over Steph, Jibril, Izuna and Ino each briefly, then spoke with a laugh.

“Wanna try having some fun suitable for the seaside?”

Part 2

The blindingly white beach.

Light shimmered on the surface of the ocean, reflecting the sky like a mirror.

Through the blue sky that appeared as though sprinkled with paint, sunlight pierced through, and the clouds swam in the distance.

There were only the noisy sounds of the waves and in the scenery with seagulls chirping, a few ripples sprayed about.

A group of people appeared to be playing on the section of the beach where the water was only up to their ankles, and Shiro tossed the beach ball they brought to the others.

"…Steph…catch."

"I just need to pass this down right? I'm going to pass OK, Izuna?"

Nimbly catching Shiro's pass, Steph passed the ball high in the air to Izuna.

Izuna stretched her hand out to catch the ball flying in her direction.

She tilted her head.

"…? I don't know the rules, des."

Maybe because she was different from Steph who could read the situations based on the actions of others, as she didn't understand the point of the entire affair, Izuna spoke somewhat in a confused manner.

"Ah~ we weren't really going to play games in the first place… but how about this, you can't catch the ball, just touch it once and take turns passing the ball to each other, whoever can't catch it will be considered the loser – something like that."

"…I understand, des…"

Steph smiled and looked at Izuna who nodded her head in agreement.

"This really gives off a relaxing sensation… isn't it great to just play relaxing games like this once in a while?"

- Just like that, Steph still had a cheery expression on her face, but she still hadn't realized.

Sora, Shiro and Izuna's gazes, had become as sharp as knives.

Since the rules had already been set and elaborated upon, this – is now a 「Game」.

Which means –

(-I must win-!)

Just like that, aside from Steph who was still as relaxed as ever, the three of them – released a burning fighting spirit…

"…Then…Shiro will start…"

Shiro spoke while asking for the ball back, silently exchanging a glance with Sora.

- Shiro who took the ball back, nonchalantly dipped it in the seawater.

"…Here…Steph, catch…"

Just like that, the paper-made beach ball with only its bottom drenched in water flew towards Steph without twirling in the air even the slightest.

It had even accurately – grasped the instant where there was no wind.

"OK, I'm going to pass~?"

It was a wordless exchange of schemes, but Steph passed the ball just the same without realizing.

Shiro had messed with the ball – if Steph were to pass the ball directly, the ball would slightly veer from the point she were to aim at.

As a result, the ball passed by Steph to Izuna spun slightly in the air.

- Because only the underside of the ball had absorbed the weight of the water, the path of the ball would shift irregularly.

"-!"

Izuna instantly spotted the slight shift of the ball.

She kicked the floor, creating a small spray of seawater, caught up to the ball and saved it.

It was a normal save, lightly caught by Izuna's arm.

But, Izuna's petite body had released the overwhelming strength of a Werebeast when saving the ball.

- Because of that, the ball flew at an abnormal speed, approaching closer to Sora.

However Sora remained calm, and grumbled to himself.

(So she really won’t let us win so easily!)

Izuna’s save became as if it was a deadly smash from a professional volleyball player, and when faced with the approaching ball, Sora intentionally dove into the sea, creating a pillar of water.

The ball went through the pillar of water – and continued to move forward, but when it reached Sora’s position, it had nowhere near the original speed.

Sora barely managed to use his foot to putt the ball towards Shiro.

- That was an extremely heavy ball that was completely absorbed with water.

“…Mm! Steph… keep it up…”

Shiro passed the soaking ball that had become heavy in an instant to Steph with some effort.

“Eh? Ah, eh!?”

Yes – she had impeccably accurately passed the ball over to a position where Steph could just catch it.

Judging from the angle of incidence and the turning angle, even if Steph could catch it –

“Ah, I’m sorry Izuna –“

Even if she could catch it, it would only fly to a position a fair distance from Izuna.

- Can’t catch it.

The ball flew towards a direction where it would be impossible to catch, but –

- Upon seeing Sora and Shiro whose mouths were curled up in victory and were muttering 「We win」 under their breaths, Izuna clenched her teeth.

“…Don’t look down on this little girl – des!!”

She kicked the floor and stepped forward – creating a pushing force.

The water originally swirling around her feet explosively spread out, revealing the surface below it.

Izuna boosted forward as though intending to rival the force she had just created.

Chasing the ball that was almost hovering over the ocean surface, Izuna maintained her speed and stretched out her arms.

The ripples created by waving her arms about were strong enough to create waves – but –

With a boom…

The surrounding water evaporated into mist, and as he saw the ball in Izuna's hands explode, Sora yelled loudly:

“OK, Izuna has lost!”

“-? …! Y, you cheated, des! You're despicable, des!”

Only realizing what had happened a beat slower than the others, Izuna protested in dissatisfaction.

Shiro replied only after exchanging a high-five with Sora.

“…The person unable to catch the ball will be considered the loser… as long as Izuna-tan were to use her full strength… she would lose.”

That's right, if Izuna as a Werebeast were to hit the ball that had become heavy due to the absorbed water with her full strength, the ball would burst as it wouldn't be able to take the impact, thus it cannot be passed to the next person –

Despite understanding that this was what Sora and others had planned since the very beginning, Izuna continued to protest.

- If the ball hadn't burst when it did, what would've happened?

Under the noise of the violent waves and ripples that Izuna had created from stepping and waving her arms about… Steph asked as though complaining:

“…You guys… don't you ever think of just having fun normally?”

“Eh? Since it's a game, then of course not.”

“…Not…at all…”

“Since it's a game, isn't it normal to strive for victory with one's goals, des?”

Hearing the unhesitant, somewhat childish replies from the three, Steph could only allow herself to be swept away with the waves…

Miko who was watching them from a distance spoke reverently:

“Oh… they managed to beat Izuna in sports, that's really something… even though they weren't planning on using legitimate ways, but it's really some-!?”

- Her sentence was interrupted.

Feeling a presence behind her, Miko immediately shifted her hands to her breasts!

But even with the superhuman reflexes of a Werebeast, she was still a few milliseconds too slow.

With her swimsuit suddenly stripped away, she could barely shield her breasts, but Miko managed to glare sharply at the 「Culprit」.

"-What is the meaning of this? The vermin over there?"

Jibril who was facing the brunt of her gaze feigned ignorance instead.

She was fiddling with the swimsuit she had stripped from Miko.

"According to Master's literature, to 「Expose one's breasts」 at a place like this would be fate ☆"

"Oh~ really… so you must adhere to the same fate as well then?"

Miko shielded her chest, but – she slightly lowered her center of gravity.

Miko had unquestionably taken on a 「Battle Stance」, while Jibril chuckled in response.

"Fine, no problem, but if you think a dog that can merely crawl on the floor can take away something from me – then I advise you to quickly change your mind-set?"

"Huh? It appears you're in the wrong here, I clearly don't merely crawl on the floor you know?"

She had a smile on her face.

While their killing intents impossible to detect with the naked eye clashed and produced sparks –

-…

"Ah, Shiro you can't swim?"

"…Eh? Steph… you can swim?"

She had initially thought that Shiro was omnipotent, but the shock stemming from that an astounding truth like that existed, caused Steph to question her.

But instead Shiro was shocked by the fact that Steph could swim –

"…Amazing, des."

"Indeed Stephanie-san is truly worthy of her name, you're capable of not only politics, cooking, sewing… but even proficient at swimming, however I have a simple question – for a land-dwelling animal, is there a need to swim in the water!?"

"Old man, you've spoken the best sentence of the century! A land-dwelling animal should remain on land!!”

- The group that couldn’t swim replied as one.

Steph smiled bitterly and grasped Shiro’s hand.

“I really don’t know how to deal with you, it’s more fun to know how to swim, here, I’ll teach you.”

“…Oh…”

“Here, I’ll hold on to your hand, just start from kicking the water with your feet.”

Steph comforted the uninterested Shiro and began teaching from the basics.

Steph took hold of Shiro’s hand.

But –

“Uwaaaahhhh!”

“Aaaaahhhhh!”

A sudden huge wave reeled in, sweeping everyone onto the beach in an instant.

“…Poof…aahhh…Nii…”

“WaaaaaSHIROaaaaaa!”

Seeing Shiro who was about to be swept away by the waves, Sora dashed up to grab her.

Shiro gasped for air while grabbing onto her brother, and mumbled:

“…Nii…Shiro wants to learn… to swim!”

Maybe because the seawater got into her eyes, Shiro spoke determinedly with tears streaking down her cheeks.

But Sora yelled towards 「The ones that created the wave」 instead:

“You two over there! Can you at least respect – or at least obey the laws of physics… can you?”

His emotional voice gradually got weaker after seeing the scene that lay before him.

What was before him was –

On the distant sea were two battling – monsters.

“Hah, despite being so arrogant, you’re only at this standard, right, huh?”

Jibril mocked while flying across the water surface.

Right below her, Miko who had jumped out below from below the water surface turned completely red in an instant, and stretched out her hand to grab her.

- Miko even used 「Blood Devastation」, but Jibril still managed to dodge that outstretched hand by a few millimeters.

But Miko directly – ran on the surface of the water – while shielding her breasts with both hands.

Miko's clothes that she had worn on her swimsuit, and even her hanten appeared to have been snatched away, so she released a murderous aura unreservedly, chasing after Jibril in an attempt to get her swimsuit back.

"Heheh ☆ Say your prayers, I'm gonna skin you alive ☆"

So this is Miko, the representative of the Werebeasts - 「The strongest Werebeast」?

She ran on the surface of the water – and occasionally despite only for an instant, even soared in the air.

Every time she dove into the sea, Miko who basked in the water and wind, had her body change from red to golden –

"…Miko-sama does live up to her name… how powerful, des."

- Upon seeing the events unfolding before her, even Izuna couldn't believe her eyes, it was unquestionably a situation with no room for others to butt in.

Sora decided to give up, and instead turned around, ignoring them.

"Mm… what a beautiful sight."

Sora spotted Ino as he turned around, and followed his line of sight.

What he saw was a group of people swept to the shore – not only Steph and Izuna.

The waves had appeared to strike the shore as well, dragging Miko's followers into the chaos as well, all of them were completely drenched –

Their subtly transparent swimsuits, created an indescribable scene.

"Oh… I see, it's still unforgivable on their part to almost let Shiro drown, but this is pretty stunning as well."

Sora carried Shiro back onto the shore.

"Ah, this really is a treat for our eyes, Sora-san."

"Yeah, it would be perfect without you."

Trying his best not to let him enter his field of vision, Sora complained to the muscular old man wearing only a loincloth.

Watching the group of noisy people being swept away by the waves, Steph smiled cheerfully.

"Hah… I've been so busy with work recently…"

The dazzling sunlight and the white beach.

Steph returned to the waterside, and kicked the water surface lightly.

The waves created by her feet, and the wind blowing in from the sea, seemed to drive away the fatigue from her daily routine –

"…I guess I need a rest once in a while."

Steph spoke passionately.

Smelling the salt of the sea breeze, Steph suddenly thought to herself when was the last time she had got the chance to relax like this?

Since Sora's bunch came along – no, since her grandfather passed away.

It felt like she hadn't relaxed in a few years – Steph breathed deeply.

"Isn't it great to be able to come here…?"

Steph spoke, seemingly seeking approval from no-one.

- Beepbeepbeep.

"OK~! Cut~~ pack up! Thanks for everyone's hard work!!"

Sora yelled with both his eyes half open.

…One after the other… everyone dragged themselves from the sea back to the shore with the spirit and energy of half-dead bodies.

"…Ugh…my hair's sandy…sand everywhere…"

"Phew… I apologize, Master, I really can't enjoy the ocean… when the sea breeze gets into my wings it makes me feel inexplicably unhappy."

"My tail's so heavy after absorbing all the water, des… how troublesome, des."

"Phew~ this feels terrible, who exactly thought of thalassotherapy[12], it's just plain ridiculous."

"My sincerest apologies, Miko-sama, for troubling you to play along with Sora-san's tricks."

Everyone's moods seemed to have taken an about turn for the worse, just like a group of actors after finishing a performance –

"…Eh? Eh?"

Steph was the only one that couldn't keep up with the situation and was left in the middle of the sea alone, watching everyone else return to shore.

"-Hmm? What are you doing? Steph, the filming's done, you can come back to the shore now."

Sora spoke while closing the recording applications of the smartphone and tablet computers set up at the trees along the shore.

"…Eh? Huh? What's going on?"

"-Hmm? Sigh, Steph don't tell me you were actually having fun earlier?"

After moving into the shade, everyone had shocked expressions on their faces while massaging their bodies.

"…Ah, sorry, about that, Steph… actually."

Maybe because he didn't think that she wouldn't notice at all, Sora spoke somewhat awkwardly:

"…Among everyone here…none of us like the ocean at all…"

- 「…Mm…」

Everyone agreed while nodding vigorously.

Amongst them Miko looked particularly disturbed.

She spoke while grooming her golden fur:

"Although I was trying to play along with the 「Common practices」 that Sora was talking about… I still don't really understand… there's a ton of sand on my tail… how am I going to get this off?"

"Shiro-san – now!"

Jibril's eyes lit up all of a sudden, and she quickly passed something to Shiro.

- At the same time, Shiro's eyes lit up as well and gave Jibril a thumbs-up, saying "Good job."

"…Miko-san…I suggest that you use…this brush and…hair conditioner."

“R, really? Thank you very much.”

“…Fondle…phew…”

Ingeniously finding an excuse to achieve her goal, Shiro let out a conniving laugh, and buried her head in Miko’s golden tail.

And Sora was holding the exact same thing that had mysteriously appeared in his hands.

“Ya~hoo~! Then I’ll help Izuna as well –“

“I’ll help Izuna groom her fur, here, Izuna come over here.”

Ino blocked his path instead.

Their eyes met – and both men glared at each other.

“…Old man, how about you go clean your own tail?”

“If Sora-san were to groom her fur Izuna would be contaminated by your malicious air, how about Sora-san you take care of your frail body instead!?”

Izuna ignored their quarrel, and unhesitatingly walked forward –

And sat down in front of Ino.

“Hurry up, des.”

“…”

“..Old man, being able to incur the killing intent of others without speaking, is that sort of expression a special ability of the Werebeasts as well?”

Looking at Ino’s expression that was so cheerful he could almost hear cries of pleasure coming from him, Sora’s veins began to pulsate violently on his forehead.

…With a whishing sound, the waves brushed against Steph’s feet.

- It seemed that everyone had forgotten about Steph’s existence completely…

Part 3

- The sun was about to sink below sea level.

"…Heheh, the sunset is so beautiful… heheheh…"

Sitting on the beach while hugging her knees, as though she had escaped into a world of her own, what was on Steph's face was… a smile.

- Suddenly Sora shouted.

"- I'm bored."

Hearing that, everyone turned to look at Sora.

"Ugh, how despicable to run away after you've won, des."

All this time until sunset, Sora and Izuna were playing with the DSP, Shogi, tic-tac-toe and other games in the shade of the trees, all these activities that would make one question why they'd bother to come to the sea in the first place, and upon hearing Sora's exclamation, Izuna protested, refusing to give in.

"Ah, it's not that, it's not because I'm bored of playing games with Izuna."

Sora stood up while speaking and shouted at the wooden box:

"Hey, Plum, shouldn't the Reception Boat be here by now?"

""Ah!""

- It appears that everyone had forgotten their original purpose, and cried out in surprise involuntarily.

Plum stuck her head out from under the box.

Maybe because she was using magic continuously for a period of time, Plum's exhausted expression once again reminded everyone of her expression when they first met. She replied:

"Um, I, didn't I say that they'd only be here about midnight…"

"The battery power of my handhelds and my tablet computer is running out, and I'm getting bored."

"That's why I said we came too early…"

The still-exhausted Plum complained dissatisfiedly.

While Sora behaved like a kid throwing a tantrum.

“No, I’m bored, I want to go now, either that or I’m going back.”

“Why’re you saying something childish like that…”

Plum appeared defeated, while Sora ignored her and exchanged a glance with Miko and Shiro.

Ever since they reached the shore, Miko was being stroked by Shiro in the shade of the trees, and Shiro was stroking Miko all this time as well.

- They nodded slightly, and spoke at once.

“Exactly… it is pretty boring here.”

“…Mm…Shiro is…tired…”

“Eh… why’re even you two saying such capricious things…”

Plum appeared heartbroken, while Sora opened his mouth to speak.

“Jibril.”

“Here.”

At his call, Jibril immediately appeared from thin air.

“Have you got the position?”

“Yes, the position calculated by the Masters should be correct.”

- Calculated?

Plum appeared confused, while Sora took out his tablet PC.

On the map detailing the perimeter of the Eastern Union, the records of their trading with Oceande had been recorded as well, and thus he had deduced the rough position of the 「City」.

Pointing to the direction indicated by its position – Sora looked towards the horizon and said:

“OK, that’s enough – do it.”

“- I obey?!”

Hearing Sora’s words, Jibril was unable to hide the jubilant expression on her face while kneeling on the floor to accept his order.

“Eh? W, what are you doing…?”

Plum asked uneasily, but Ino was about to ask the same question.

Ino’s 「Instinct」 as a Werebeast warned him of something.

To elaborate, it seemed that the situation needed to be stopped.

Whatever these people were about to do – it definitely wouldn’t be something good.

So Ino glanced sideways at Miko.

He let out a breath of relief only after seeing Miko nod her head slightly to indicate 「It’s all right」.

But as he saw Miko smile as though to say 「Be careful though」, Ino’s face paled.

Sora lifted up Shiro, and spoke a single sentence.

“We’ll go off ourselves, everyone back off.”

After which, Sora and others left the waterside, which was when Jibril asked:

“- Master, is it really OK to be doing this?”

She appeared impatient – but she still made the final confirmations excitedly.

“It’s fine, besides won’t the power of the 「Ten Oaths」 come into effect?”

「The First」 of the Ten Oaths.

- All bloodshed, war and pillage is forbidden throughout the world.

“Any actions with harming intent, and any actions seen as involving violence, will be canceled due to the limitations of the oaths – conversely speaking, actions not involving harming intent won’t be cancelled. Which means the 「Only God (Tet)」 has guaranteed that when we do it, that action won‘t be considered as violating the rights of anyone, so –“

Sora revealed a daring smile, and gave a thumbs-up.

“Make it as large as you can.”

Hearing his response, Jibril as though receiving a sacred order ceremoniously bowed, but her facial expression contrasted with her actions as she smiled in relief. Jibril stood up.

“Hahah, hahahahah~ I don’t know how many years it’s been since I’ve last used this, hehehe~ I’m looking forward to this~…”

Jibril had an intoxicated expression on her face, and mumbled to herself so. At this time her surroundings –

- Suddenly distorted.

Apparently the light – no, as though space itself had twisted, everything became distorted with their shapes changing.

- 「The Ten Oaths」.

The usage of violence in this world – any actions intending to cause harm will be prevented by the power of the oaths.

Regarding this, Ino understood perfectly, but when personally faced with those events, goosebumps still appeared on his skin.

“OK, everyone get back!”

Miko ordered calmly but sharply.

This sentence, made all present Werebeasts, as though their bodies and free will had separated from themselves, reflexively leap backward.

“…Eh? What’s happening?”

Due to Miko’s loud yell, Steph finally snapped back to reality. [13]

- Suddenly, she realized she was the only one that was particularly close to the ocean.

Crash – a sound outside of the audible range caused the area to tremor.

The sand on the beach even ignored gravity and began dancing about, while space continued to distort.

The space that was slowly distorting and changing shape began to gather at Jibril’s hands.

Plum was the only other one there who could see magic – the only other one that could see Spirits.

But as she looked at what Jibril was doing, she still appeared completely confused.

Judging from Sora’s explanation earlier… it wasn’t surprising.

What Jibril was doing was – 「Absorbing all Spirits in the area」.

When the Spirits that are supposed to be in a place are removed, then one naturally wouldn’t be able to see anything, just like a black hole.

And – in Jibril’s hands, the absorbed Spirits were being compressed, squeezed, condensed, minimized, concentrated, and finally let out a glow of light.

Even though Imanity that can’t see spirits, Sora and Shiro were able to see clearly what was going on.

In Jibril’s right hand, a swirling vortex-like pillar of light gradually began to form.

Regarding things related to magic or Spirits, Sora and Shiro could neither comprehend nor detect them, but –

The halo on Jibril’s head had become a ball of light from spinning way too fast.

Which could only mean one thing.

“…Hey, eh? You’re joking! Eh? Eh~~!?”

Plum who had finally realized what was going on, hurriedly tried to seek shelter, yet yelled instead as she was unable to free herself from the box.

Yes, this scene could only mean one thing.

And that is Jibril was preparing to cast a spell that was, at least by Sora and Shiro’s standards, never-before-seen, at a completely inhuman and irregular dimension.

As the shape was not fixed at all, 「It」 could neither be classified as a sword or a spear.

But Jibril was grasping tightly onto it with her right hand.

And she – slowly raised it – revealing a sweet smile.

“So then Master…”

“I will use - 「A B O U T F I V E P E R C E N T」 of my full power then?”

Jibril’s right hand descended with a speed as though to leave her previous sentence in the dust.

That was all Sora and others could witness.

It was like hearing thunder only slightly after lightning strikes.

After a few seconds, along with an exploding sound loud enough to quake the earth, a huge wave swept up tall enough to reach the heavens –

It was almost as if jokingly - 「The sea parted」.

And then –

“Kyaaaaaaaaaahhhh!”

“Aaaaahhhhhhhhhh!”

The aftershock from the impact, swept Steph and Plum still in the box over to Sora and others.

- This is what they saw after that.

“Phew…? It’s such a great feeling to be able to use my powers.”

As though greatly relaxed, Jibril had an invincible, cheerful smile on her face.

“I hope the time will come – where I get to use 100% full power?”

Hearing that, even Sora and Shiro released a cold sweat.

Only 5% was enough to part the ocean, shaming even Moses… they suddenly recalled –

Jibril had previously unleashed full force upon the Elves, which means a 100% 「Airstrike」.

They hadn’t completely blocked it, but they did manage to deflect it partially –

“…The Elves…Fii’s bunch really is amazing.”

“…Nod.”

The both of them couldn’t resist commenting – while Shiro nodded in respect for her who wasn’t present at the time.

As for their inner thoughts, Jibril of course knew nothing.

“Anyway we can now 「See」 the capital of the Seirens, so I can teleport you anytime.”

…The five senses of the Werebeasts were at their physical peaks.

Certainly not to say Ino, Izuna and even Miko could only see the horizon.

Maybe because the previous strike had bent the light, for Jibril that had said she could 「See」 it earlier, everyone remained speechless.

- Sora looked at everyone who had backed away earlier.

“OK, everyone, let’s go, grab onto Jibril.”

Miko and the Werebeasts appeared defeated, and returned to the beach in trepidation.

“I had known this since earlier… but to see it myself, it’s just like a bad joke.”

“…Ugh… the best course of action would be not to get involved with the Flügel at all…”

Plum climbed out from the broken wooden box, and spoke after Miko, luckily, the sun had already set.

Ino then yelled in panic:

“Sora-san! Please don’t let Miko-sama hear 「That noise」!”

Ino called out, apparently afraid of the sound of space distorting created by long-distance teleportation.

“Ah, he’s right, Jibril.”

“Yes, I understand, so – everyone please grab tightly… ah, hey, Dora-chan stop sleeping already, get up.”

“…Eh? Huh? What happened – w, what is this!? The sea parted!?”

Steph yelled alone, while everyone else ignored her reaction and gathered around Jibril.

“So we’ll teleport now, off to the capital of the Seirens – Oceande.”

Jibril’s wings began glowing again, and her halo spun faster and faster.

“The distance is three hundred and seventy-eight point twenty-three kilometers, but the parted ocean waters are about to return to normal.”

As though in response to her words, the seawater rumbled and began to return to their original position.

“So, I predict that Oceande won’t have any air.”

“Ah, I, it’s fine, I have a spell for breathing underwater –“

It was unclear whether they didn’t hear Plum, or whether they were simply ignoring her –

“So – I’m going to teleport the air in a radius of two hundred meters along with us then?”

“-Eh?”

“Get back!”

Miko’s voice rang out once again.

Hearing this, aside from Ino and Izuna – even the Werebeasts that were with them at the seaside previously hurriedly left as well.

- In an instant.

Leaving behind only the exploding noise at an extremely high frequency created by space shattering, the group disappeared.

“”Kyaaaaaahhhhhhh!””

As the air that was removed refilled itself, an explosively low air pressure was created.

A miniscule tornado began blowing, and the remaining Werebeast females grabbed onto tree trunks in defense – while any who could witness that scene… were gone.

Chapter 3 - Charmer/sslldll ll⊥

Part 1

- 「Oceando」…the underwater city where both the Seirens and Dhampir reside.

It did not carry out trade with any other nation, being a truly self-providing hermit country.

Being at the bottom of the sea, it cannot be reached through normal means.

And exactly because of this, a bunch of people came forth with abnormal means.

Jibril parted the sea, and the place she teleported to was a tower high enough to overlook the whole of Oceando.

The depth was about two hundred meters, and if that amount of seawater were to flow back in…

"Something like this would happen…"

Miko, who was standing behind Sora let out a sigh, and what she was looking at was – the other side of the air bubble Jibril had created.

The sand and rocks at the bottom of the ocean were violently tossed and turned as though they were in a gigantic blender.

No matter how powerful Jibril was, she would be unable to use violence due to the limitations of the 「Oaths」.

If the 「Oaths」 did exercise their power, then no harm should have been caused to anyone…

"…You're sure that this won't hit the city or anyone else, right?"

"No, not at all. The 「Ten Oaths」 are absolute, so it's fine. There won't be a problem… probably."

Sora attempted to comfort himself as the tides calmed around him. The sand settled, and the seawater became clear once again.

"- Oh, this really is something."

"…Beautiful…"

Sora and Shiro spoke their thoughts regarding the huge and wide city below them.

Completely different from how fairytale-like and simplistic Sora thought it would be, it was really a great 「City」.

Immeasurable amounts of buildings that appeared to be built from stones from the bottom of the sea stood side by side.

The walls that were giving off a pearly glow had shells and corals pasted on them like bricks, creating wonderfully bright and fresh colors. Possibly due to the buoyancy of the water, complex formations and reverse cone-shaped buildings could be seen – which was when Sora spoke:

"…Hmm? Why isn't everything blue?"

At the bottom of the sea, only blue rays of light from the sun should be able to reach. The person to answer his question was Shiro.

"…Nii, it's probably… those."

Shiro pointed to the countless glowing seaweeds and jellyfish – completely natural 「Streetlights」.

- It was no wonder that the city itself was glowing.

"Oh come on, don't treat me like an idiot. Anyway, isn't this a great-looking city?"

"…Hah, thanks for the compliment…"

Plum replied with a bitter smile that carried hints of defeat and humiliation.

"Because this place was built and maintained by the Dhampirs… haha…"

…Sora couldn't find any words to say to her, and instead turned around.

Jibril, Izuna and Steph were surveying their surroundings curiously, while Miko appeared as composed as ever.

And –

"- Sora-san…what is the meaning…of this…?"

Ino asked painfully, apparently impacted by the noise from their teleportation.

"I did adhere to your request since Izuna and Miko appear to be fine, so you have to thank Jibril for this!"

"…Ah~ I have no problem with that, but could you just let me say something?"

Miko looked at Sora, Shiro and Jibril in turn, and took a deep breath.

"- You people, there's got to be a limit to your ignorance…"

"Eh?"

"…Is there…a problem?"

"Oh, does the carnivorous subgenus of a mutt have something to say?"

The three ignorant people tilted their heads in curiosity at once.

While the few with some common sense – Steph spoke loudly as though representing Miko:

"P-parting the sea like that, no matter how you look at it it just seems like an act of hostility doesn't it!? So, how are you planning to get us to their queen at this rate?"

"They invited us in the first place, and it was they as well who made us wait, so since we're running out of time and in a hurry we came here ourselves. Considering Jibril's hard work, they should be thanking us and receiving us with song and dance, shouldn't they?"

Miko and Izuna's senses told them that Sora was spouting lies yet again, and they shut their mouths half-heartedly.

The remaining Werebeast – Ino continued to rub his ears while moaning in pain.

"…Ah~ about that don't you worry… look over there."

But as they heard Plum speak, everyone looked in the direction she was pointing at once.

Countless people began darting out of the city and hurriedly began proceeding in their direction.

- Females with the lower half of their bodies covered with scales and resembling fish tails, and the upper half of their bodies human-shaped.

Their breasts were shielded with small wraps of cloth, and their necks and hands had what appeared to be leftover jewelry on them.

Their resemblances were exactly the same as fairytale beings - 「Mermaids」.

"…Ah, so those are the Seirens? Great, luckily everything's going as planned."

If the things that came out were beings like Cthulhu Sora would be more than ready to flip tables, but he felt relieved at this development. [14]

"G-guys look over there, all those people are panicking… they really must be angry."

Steph spoke uneasily while looking at the Seirens standing in front of their air bubble, after which –

"Eh, eh…?"

Steph opened her eyes wide in shock.

The Seirens were gracefully swimming while spinning round and round in the water, displaying their glittering scales.

Their incredibly colorful jewelry made of corals and pearls displayed on their smooth, snow-white skin swayed about along with the current.

No fixed rhythm could be detected from their movements.

The glowing jellyfish were lit up by blue rays of light, the schools of fish of varying colors, not to mention the mermaids gracefully swimming –

Such a dreamlike sight would attract anyone’s attention, which probably meant –

“…Nii, this is their grateful and welcoming…dance.”

“- Apparently so… l-look here, Steph, didn’t I say there wasn’t a problem!”

“These people really are magnanimous as the ocean is deep…”

After a while, a Seiren that appeared to be wearing the most beautiful jewelry swam forth –

She waved both her hands, and her mouth opened and closed randomly.

Observing her motions, Steph tilted her head, not understanding what was going on, while Sora realized what was going on.

“We’re in the air Jibril created for us, and they’re out there in the water – sound probably won’t travel.”

“Yeah… I’ll go explain and drink some blood along the way so I can use the power from that to cast a spell that will allow all of you to breathe in the water, so please remove this air barrier after that…”

As she finished her sentence, Plum immediately sprinted forward, broke through the air bubble and swam into the water.

They glanced at her as she left.

“Even if we really are saviors of their species…”

“- They still welcomed us this warmly after the gates to their city were forced open with an attack like that?”

Hearing Jibril and Miko’s whispers with sharp glances on their faces, Sora laughed coldly as well:

“…The Seirens, are they really idiots? Or –“

Part 2

“Hello~ everyone~, hehe ☆ I am Her Majesty the Queen’s representative, Amira~! Everything’s OK~ ☆”

They’re idiots.

Sora managed to swallow his blatantly honest thought.

After Jibril removed the air bubble, a Seiren had rushed up immediately.

「This Person」 who called herself Amira, if her words could be trusted – but the scary part was they probably could be – she was the sole representative over all the existing Seirens at the moment.

She had silky green hair, snow-white skin that was almost transparent, and clear blue eyes.

She wore coral jewelry all about her, but she didn’t give off a vulgar air.

Considering she was a mermaid, it would probably be a legitimate form of dressing, but her personality was –

“Thank you all for coming specially, like really thanks a lot~ ☆ ~~~Really, the only way I can express my feelings right now would be through a kiss~! Fufu ☆ Right?”

“...No thanks, I’ll cherish your well wishes though…”

It wasn’t a matter of honorifics or anything like that, although what she spoke could be considered as Imanity, everything about it was strange.

Sora and the others were gaping in shock, while Amira continued to swim around busily.

“Even in the depths of the ocean, rumors of the conquests of both of you have reached here as well~ ☆The miraculous king here to save the Imanity sounds like an incredibly handsome person just by hearing about him, and your looks suit Amira’s preference as well~!! Right ☆”

“…Oh, really?”

It was the first time that he was called handsome by a girl… but why was it?

He wasn’t happy at all… thinking of those miscellaneous things, Sora nodded in agreement.

“Aha ☆ Your voice is so cool as well!! Amira’s so wet~ ah, because I’m in the ocean~ hehe☆”

Sora glanced at Plum wordlessly, while she silently returned his gaze while shaking her head in sadness.

Amira didn’t seem to mind that sort of attitude at all, and instead continued with a smile plastered on her face:

“Oh~ we’ve prepared a feast, hehe ☆ Would you like to have the food? Or•perhaps•have •me? ♥”

Amira shook her body in an attempt to seduce Sora.

While Ino accidentally revealed a lecherous expression on his face, and his temperature rose –

“First let us see 「The Empress」, your welcome can wait until after that.”

Hearing Sora’s obvious rejection, Ino perked his ears up in surprise.

But Amira didn’t seem to mind.

“Ah, you really are as focused as they say ☆ But if so Amira might like you even more, you know ☆”

“…Really…anyway please lead us there.”

“OK~ ☆ So let’s swim into the city~ follow me, over here~ phew~ ♥”

With Amira leading the way, Sora and others descended the tower and headed in the direction of Oceando.

Sora heard Ino speaking behind him.

“…Sora-san, it’s amazing that you could reject her so quickly.”

“Huh?”

“No, in the ocean even the senses of us Werebeasts will be limited, so I can’t grasp Sora-san’s true intentions… but considering that even when being seduced by such an attractive woman you still can remain composed, Sora-san, do you have superhuman self-control –“

However Sora glared at Ino coldly in response, and he spoke as though spitting:

“Old man, are you that desperate, even though I’m a virgin, what do you expect me to feel about someone of that standard… let’s go, Shiro.”

“…Mm…”

Leaving behind the speechless Ino, Sora swam towards the city while carrying Shiro –

Part 3

Immediately as they stepped into Oceando, they were welcomed by extravagant cheers.

Every single Seiren had joyful smiles on their faces, and were dancing seductively while playing completely out-of-tune music.

As for the language – there was probably no need for them to speak Imanity anyway, as although they couldn’t understand the Seirens, they could definitely sense their welcoming intent.

In the midst of the joyfully frolicking crowds of Seirens, what appeared to be female Dhampirs could be seen occasionally.

Their facial expressions were in contrast with the Seirens, not all that different from Plum’s.

Those were pitiful… tired smiles, and their expressions as they welcomed Sora’s bunch seemed to say 「Thank you for coming this far」.

- In exchange for a constant source of blood from the Seirens, the Dhampirs were to assist the Queen in reproducing.

Before their Queen was hibernating the two races were in a state of perfect mutualism, but now their relations were like a candle in the wind – however –

“I’m curious, how can these people remain so cheerful and lively even when their race is nearing extinction?”

Yes – leaving out the Dhampirs, the Seirens didn’t appear gloomy in the slightest.

“- Didn’t I explain before … they completely don’t understand what is happening to them.”

Plum replied with a weary smile, while Jibril continued:

“Because the Seirens are so incredibly dumb that their stupidity has reached legendary status, and in the languages of all the nations the very mention of their species have become synonymous to 「Idiots」, and even that term itself has been used to refer to the 「Seirens」 as well, even being used as verbs in sentences.”

Sora and others walked along the sea floor with Amira leading them.

- Walking in water.

It didn’t feel like walking nor swimming, which caused Shiro to feel curious at this new sensation, while Sora walked forward while carrying her just the same.

Ino and Izuna, not to mention Miko – they truly were Werebeasts.

They had quickly mastered the act of walking under these circumstances, and were bounding forward naturally.

Even when in the ocean Jibril still 「Flew around」.

“- Or should I say, Imanity are even more inferior to the idiot Seirens?”

To be perfectly honest, the ones there that were clearly unsuited to moving underwater were obviously Sora and Shiro.

“Before I met my Masters, I would reply 「Yes」 - but to put it more eloquently, they’re only ranked higher because they have special abilities, but otherwise they’re a really stupid species.”

Jibril spoke all smiles, while Plum continued wearily:

“These people only know how to eat, sleep, have sex and play, nothing more… fish do contain nutrition that can make people smarter, but the fish themselves are rather stupid… isn’t it unbelievable?”

- This world really doesn’t have species that can get along with each other… Sora thought and looked into the horizon.

“…That’s true… even their representative is someone like this.”

“No… the fact that Amira-sama can speak Imanity is already good enough…”

Good enough - Sora looked towards Plum sympathetically.

When faced with Sora’s gaze, Plum’s expression immediately turned into that of someone that has accepted his/her fate and spoke:

“Because we’re all in the same boat… I sincerely plead Sora-dono and others to help them find ways to solve this problem – even the ones that suggested previous methods were Dhampirs… since the Seirens don’t have any sense of urgency, they’re only good at mating… hahah… sigh…”

“…It’s really been hard on you…”

With Amira at the lead, they entered a particularly tall building in Oceando.

During the course of their journey, Sora raised a question that had come to him suddenly.

“Speaking of mating, Jibril, the Seirens mate with males of other species right?”

“Yes, you’re absolutely right.”

“The sixteen races don’t have any 「Hybrids」 between races?”

- Although Sora and Shiro were only in this world for a short period of time, but regarding things like half-elves commonly seen in fictional worlds - 「Hybrids」, they had yet to hear of.

“That’s perfectly normal.” Jibril replied.

“The reason why they don’t exist is because although the sixteen races all have certain similarities with each other, their souls are completely different.”

- Souls again?

「Souls」 that were yet to be proven to exist in Sora’s original world, appeared to be commonplace knowledge in this one.

Those were probably something like chromosomes, Sora told himself, and continued:

“But don’t the Seirens mate with other species? Won’t their offspring be Seiren hybrids?”

“No, their offspring will be pure 「Seirens」.”

“Even though they are two different types of souls?”

“It’s just like how the Dhampirs absorb souls by drinking blood, Seirens obtain souls from mating and carry out 「Metamorphosis」, creating their own clones, so their methods of mating are even more ineffective than 「Living beings」, sapping the other party dry in the process as well.”

“…That really is lethal.”

“Really? According to textual records – the act itself brings 「Joy paralleling assumption」.”

“So they really go through assumption quite literally… and it’s a 「Journey of no return」.”

But forget it – no matter how you put it.

“Because of that, to produce hybrids – to produce offspring carrying characteristics of two different species is impossible.”

Sora thought for a moment, and figured – Tet probably let there be 「Sixteen Races」 since they can’t produce hybrids.

“- Jibril, is there something on my face?”

Sora noticed that Jibril was staring at him intently.

“I think I’ve told you before that the Flügel aren’t 「Living beings」.”

“Yeah, you said that your species aren’t 「Living beings」 but 「Life」 right.”

“Yes, and it’s because of that that souls have no fixed shape, so as long as you extract a part of someone else’s soul and combine it with mine, you could produce an offspring belonging to the other party’s species – it’s like physical coitus, but in theory it’s still possible to transcend species and produce a hybrid.”

“- I still don’t get what you’re trying to say.”

At this point she lowered her head reverently, moved her halo to the back of her head, and folded up her wings –

This was a gesture of loyalty to her Master alone, and Jibril clasped her hands together tightly and spoke as though a prayer:

“As long as Master wishes to have a child, the inferior Jibril is willing to do it anytime –“

“…Jibril…shut up…”

Shiro’s razor-edged words, forced Jibril to shut her mouth.

“We’re~~~~ here~!”

Sora heard a loud and bright voice all of a sudden, and looked up.

“Sorry to keep you all waiting! This is the Empress’ room~ ♪”

Amira stretched out one hand and pushed open the door slowly –

- Light spilled out from the opening.

The Empress’ room was rather wide, and the carpets and atrium were pink.

Faintly glowing seaweeds were placed on the walls, and what appeared to be decorative woven patterns lit up the room.

Painted glass was etched onto the tall ceiling, causing sunlight that had reached the floor of the ocean to spill into the room.

Although the faint sunlight seemed unnecessary – as on the glowing throne right below them, there was a gigantic, beautiful crystal glowing noticeably.

No, it was a pretty-looking transparent imitation crystal… a block of ice.

“-……”

Everyone was speechless when faced with that sight.

At this point Amira solemnly – or at least attempted to act solemnly – announced:

“Now I will introduce to everyone… this is the Empress of the Seirens… Leila•Lorelei-dono.”

- A beautiful woman was sleeping within the block of ice.

Wave-like blue hair fell on her youthful face.

Her snow-white body was decorated with blinding strips of gold and the lower half of her body had attractive scales on it.

Those scales reflected the light in the room, appearing extremely colorful.

The 「Empress」 ornamented in light and gold and encased within the coffin of ice, silently sat on the bivalve throne with her eyes closed.

Plum and Amira were quietly discussing behind everyone who was still speechless.

“A-Amira-sama… regarding them awakening the Empress… Sora-dono and the rest said that they wish to challenge everyone here to a game… is that all right?”

Hearing Plum’s words, Amira appeared momentarily troubled, but then she replied:

“Alright, no problem ☆ But do you have any issues over your side?”

“Nope… s-so I wish to get the help of about thirty people to help with the spells involved.”

“Mm.” Amira nodded her head.

“OK ☆ So I’ll be off to make preparations for Her Majesty’s awakening~ ☆ Since you want everyone to use magic at once, you’ll need blood right~ Hehe ☆ Amira will go get everyone else, so I’ll leave everything to Plum for now ☆”

“Alright… t-then I’ll make preparations for the spell to enter Her Majesty’s dream state…”

She took a bow and left the room with Amira.

- But everyone else didn’t seem to have noticed her departure.

They were merely focusing on the block of ice with the Empress sleeping within.

“W-what a beautiful woman…”

Steph seemed to have forgotten that she was a woman herself, and complimented her passionately.

When faced with her stunning appearance, no elaboration was needed for Ino’s reaction, while Jibril, Miko and even Izuna felt the same way.

Their gazes were blindly attracted to her, but –

"Hmm…? Is she that pretty? Shiro?"

"…I…don't really understand…"

""What!~~~?"

Everyone else was stunned by their reactions.

"A-are the both of you not right in the head!? I-if this woman isn't a beauty, then who is!?"

"…You're the one that needs to calm down, she's not beautiful to the extent where you have to be this shocked right?"

Faced with Steph's protests, Sora merely spoke with his forehead wrinkled in impatience.

He looked at the Empress once again.

- Leila Lorelei, the Empress of the mermaids asleep within a coffin of ice.

Her appearance was certainly beautiful.

But Sora could confidently say – she was 「Different」.

For example, her beauty was different from Jibril's that could shame even a work of art.

It was different from Miko's bewitched, almost holy beauty under the moonlight as well.

It was different from Izuna's pure, untainted cuteness as well, not to mention –

"…? Nii…?"

Sora looked beside him – at his confused-looking sister, and he confirmed his thoughts.

"- She's no contest at all, or should I say, even Steph is superior to her?"

"…F-flattering me that obviously, even I'll get angry you know!?"

"No, what use is there even if I flatter you…"

Sora looked at her in irritation, while Ino patted him on the back.

"Sora-san, no, it's fine, don't worry."

He continued kindly:

"Don't worry about it at all – impotence is curable, I'll take you to eat soft-shelled turtle steamboat next time…"

“It’s not like that at all, stop ruining my reputation!!”

Sora pointed to the block of ice and yelled.

“Can you all calm down!! I’m not calling her ugly, but when compared to the likes of Miko-san, Jibril, Izuna and Shiro, is she really something to fawn over!? I mean what I say, everyone here are all supreme beauties!!”

Steph and Ino continued to look at Sora pitifully, but –

Hearing Sora’s words, only Jibril and Miko came back to their senses.

“Amazing, Master… this is what I was referring to earlier, the Seirens’ 「Ability」.”

“- Ah?”

Miko and Jibril tore their gazes from the block of ice, and Jibril continued:

“The Seirens don’t have special bodies or magic, but the fact that they’ve managed to survive for this long can be attributed to their greatest and only weapon, which is –“

Jibril took a deep breath.

“As long as they’re in the water – they have 「The ability to attract anything」.”

“The Seirens are a species that have received the blessings of the water – the reason why they stay in the ocean and cannot leave it is because of the large amount of Spirits in their bodies… 「Water Spirits」, and they can 「Attract」 all other spirits.”

“…Ah…”

“Ah, I see.”

Sora and Shiro nodded their heads in understanding, seeming to have understood what was going on.

Before the 「Ten Oaths」, the Seirens reproduced by consuming males of other species.

Since they didn’t have any superhuman strength nor any magic and couldn’t leave the sea, how did they survive?

The answer was – they 「Seduce」 others and attract them.

This would explain why they could swim along with the fishes and could withstand the water pressure of the deep sea without magic.

“Isn’t that like seduction magic?”

“Yes, to put it simply they control the movements of spirits – something like using magnets to attract them, which is the ability of their species… which wasn't something particularly important originally, but –“

Jibril glared over at the Empress, and once again averted her eyes.

“But, this mermaid over here – the amount of spirits she possesses can be considered an 「Anomaly」.”

Jibril spoke unhappily as she was unable to resist the Empress' charms.

While the other person who should've known what was going on as well – Miko scratched her head with a helpless expression on her face.

Changing the subject –

“But… why doesn't it work on the Masters?”

Jibril asked curiously.

“…Hmm…? Jibril said it herself…we don't have…spirits.”

“Yeah, you did say that, everyone in this world has spirits within them, but Shiro and I don't.”

When they had first met, to prove to her that they were from another world, they had let Jibril scan their bodies for spirits.

If their ability was to attract spirits like magnets, the fact that it didn't work on Sora and Shiro should have been obvious, but –

“No, as long as there are souls, there should be spirits presents. Maybe Master's spirits are too faint for me to detect, or maybe your spirits are undetectable – but if so, why would there be no effect – this is strange.”

Jibril muttered to herself, with her interest once again returning to Sora and Shiro, and she looked at them excitedly.

- While Ino who was standing beside her spoke:

“Or is it simply because Sora-san can't get erect as a man?”

“You shut the hell up, old man, you only think about the lower halves of the body, don't you, but I am a man of reason.”

“Sorry to keep you all waiting~!”

- Plum and Amira returned noisily.

Was the spell to enter the Empress' dream state ready?

The two of them approached the block of ice where the Empress was sleeping.

"So now we'll use Plum's magic to let you all into Her Majesty's dreams."

That cheerful smile was still on her face.

Amira nonchalantly continued:

"To all of you who wish to awaken the Empress, please 「Swear to the Oaths」 and bet all that you have, then touch the crystal~"

-……

"Huh? Hey, what did you say?"

Steph broke the silence and asked.

Amira replied with another question in shock:

"Eh? Is there a problem?"

"Of course there's a problem, what are you talking about!?"

…Bet all that you have?

Does that mean in the sense where the person's wealth, identity, freedom, life – everything is put on the line?

"Is there a need for that? We came to help you upon your request!!"

"Sigh~ Plum, did you bring them here without telling them everything?"

"Um… I'm sorry…"

Amira prodded her cheek with a troubled expression on her face, while Plum insistently apologized.

While the one that interrupted them was –

"Calm down, Steph, you're the one that doesn't understand."

Sora's tone was calm as always.

Seeing how calm he was, Steph turned around and observed everyone's reactions.

Not just Sora and Shiro – but Miko, Jibril, Ino and even Izuna had expressions of understanding on their faces.

“We were invited here to – awaken the Empress through the 「Empress’ Game」, right?”

“The third of 「The Ten Oaths」 states that in games, wagers will be made on what both parties decide to be of value – while the Empress 「Swore on the Oaths」 to hibernate, since the requirements of the 「Game」 to awaken her is to make her fall in love with the other party, a 「Bet」 of equal value is needed for her love – right?”

“Completely right, handsome man, not only your appearance, but your brain is handsome as well!”

Amira laughed and nodded her head in agreement, but –

Only Sora had noticed, which was when Miko and Shiro revealed thin smiles on their faces.

Steph who hadn’t noticed still couldn’t agree.

“T-that sort of thing is just too weird –“

- She continued to question them.

“They’re the ones that are on the brink of extinction, we’re here to help, so why do we have to face that kind of risk!?”

Sora replied as relaxed as ever.

“Plum did say earlier, to interfere with relationships and dreams should’ve been impossible under the 「Ten Oaths」, it was only possible because the Empress agreed on it – but her agreement is merely within the game itself.”

- Which is to say –

“If we don’t begin the 「Empress’ Game」, all sorts of spells wouldn’t be able to be used, so there would be no other way to awaken her, and to obtain the rights to play a game against her, the 「Bet」 she requires is –“

Sora looked over at Plum and Amira and spoke in a joking tone:

“「If you want my love you must have the drive to sacrifice everything!」…something like that right?”

Steph remained stunned, while everyone else appeared defeated.

Only Amira continued to ramble on.

“Co~rrect~ an~swer! Ah~ I really don’t want to give you to the Empress, are you sure you don’t want to be with me instead?”

Ignoring Amira, Sora spoke:

“Anyway since we have magic that will allow the Empress to fall in love with us, there shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Y-yes! I can confirm it, leave everything to me!”

“S-something like that – what if the magic doesn’t work!?”

Steph still couldn’t lose her sense of apprehension, but –

“Just leave that to Amira~”

Amira spoke clearly:

“Even if you guys can get into the game successfully, the Empress in charge of the bets is still hibernating, so her possessions will be in my care! If the magic doesn’t work I’ll return everything, so there won’t be any risk ♪”

“No, that sort of verbal promise –“

Sora interrupted her mid-sentence.

“OK, there’s no problem – let’s begin the game.“

Steph felt something was amiss.

She felt that something wasn’t right somewhere, why would such high-risk conditions only be mentioned now?

Steph looked at Sora, why didn’t Sora feel any suspicion about the entire affair?

This wasn’t like the usual Sora, to accept such a suspicious-sounding game –

Steph once again surveyed her surroundings.

Aside from her, everyone else didn’t seem to have any queries, and didn’t have anything to say.

(W-what’s going on…? What’s happening here?)

Plum then began explaining the rules of the game.

“So – after all of you bet everything you have, please 「Swear on the Oaths」 and touch the block of ice… after which the Dhampirs under the platform and I will cast a spell and lead all of you into Her Majesty’s dream… to perform the 「Love Magic (cheat)」 I’ll follow you as well…”

Plum began planning out the spell accordingly while explaining at the same time:

“Since it’s a dream, the surroundings can be set according to whatever all of you want… so – Sora-dono will decide right? I will try and go according to Sora-dono’s imagination and construct Her

Majesty's dream correspondingly… no matter the situation – the victory condition remains."

Sora helped Plum continue her sentence:

"As long as someone makes the Queen fall in love with him and awaken her it will be a 「Victory」, but if you get dumped it will be considered a 「Loss」- while the loser will leave the game and give away 「Everything」 according to the bet – so we just have to swear to the oaths along the lines of this right?"

"Y-yes… b-but…"

Sora interrupted her in understanding:

"I get it, we have Plum's love magic (cheat), and even if we lose we can just get everything back from Amira – that's what you were planning to say right? Take it easy."

Sora smiled fearlessly.

Steph sensed something amiss about that smile, however, while Sora continued:

"With our current lineup and the conditions provided the possibility of us losing is zero, so hurry up and start the game already."

"A-alright – so Sora-dono, please imagine how you want the dream world to be like, and then –"

Hearing her words, Sora began imagining it.

As long as dating games were mentioned, he wouldn't make the normal kind.

"Please swear to the oaths!"

" - 「Aschente」!"

Sora, Shiro, Steph, Jibril, Miko, Ino, Izuna and Plum.

As all of them spoke that single word at once, their surroundings turned white.

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- After which it turned from white to blue instantly.

As though just waking up from a dream, they slowly regained their consciousness.

Throughout their lethargic bodies, blood began circulating normally, their senses returned to them, and –

“Aaaaahhhpfffffftttt!?”

- They were drowning.

In the middle of the sea, Sora and Shiro, Izuna, Ino and even Miko were being tossed around by the waves.

They could only smell the burning odor of the tides, and pain assaulted the deepest parts of their nostrils.

As their calm thoughts were being flung into a distance – a video began playing within their subconscious.

“-With every end there is a beginning-“

There were overly flashy special effects, and sound effects that sounded like stars collapsing.

A narrator that sounded like it was reading off a script continued blandly.

“There are meetings and there are separations –“

“THIS ISN’T THE TIME TO BE PLAYING THE OPENING CREDITS, RIGHT!?”

Sora struggled to raise his head above the water level, and roared angrily.

“Which bloody universe’s version of 「Toki〇 Memorial」 starts with the protagonist drowning? My heart isn’t exactly beating hard right now!” [15]

No, their hearts were beating violently.

But Sora didn’t want to use the term 「Heartbeat」 to describe the dying throes of one’s heart when faced with a life-threatening situation.

“Ah, s-sorry… I confused Sora-dono and Her Majesty’s imaginations of what the dream world should be like, it takes time to create the scene… please wait a while more…”

Thinking closely, this was rather unavoidable.

Since they were able to interfere with the Empress’ dreams, this world couldn’t have a 「Schoolyard setting」 like in Sora’s world.

Of course, Sora’s imagination needed to be combined with the Empress’ knowledge, and –

“…Nii…I lived…a good life…”

“Plum~! My sister’s already giving up on survival, so hurry up already~~!”

Shiro closed her eyes with a blissful expression on her face, while Sora hugged her and yelled loudly.

“- Ah, ah, the spell is complete, I’ll construct the setting now!”

- In an instant.

The original 「Setting (scene)」 of them drowning in the ocean was removed, and changed immediately like flipping the pages of a book.

The 「Stage」 switched from the ocean itself to the sea floor, and unnecessary 「Settings」 like breathing were removed.

Like flipping over poker cards face down one by one, various changes to make the game run smoothly were implemented, and the dream world was able to accept 「Unreasonable」 settings.

“- Master, are you alright?”

Hearing Jibril’s loud cries, Sora returned to his senses – not realizing that he was now on solid ground.

“…T-that was…horrifying…”

In the clear blue ocean, Sora spat out 「a single breath」, and wiped off 「the sweat on his brow」.

Shiro was shivering in fear due to nearly drowning early, and Sora hugged her while complaining dissatisfiedly.

“The game hadn’t even started and we were already facing a death end, can you please not use that sort of weird plot settings here?”

“…I still…hate the ocean…”

“The 「Sea」 that caused the Masters harm… it appears there is a need to remove it completely.”

“Wouldn’t it be fine if you were to just learn to swim…”

At this point, Steph who appeared to be the only relaxed one spoke with her eyes half open.

But Miko and others beside her – all the Werebeasts in frustration – agreed with Jibril’s words.

“…Yeah, who cares about the ocean, who created these weird puddles anyway?”

“I have to agree with Jibril-san for once, just let the sea dry off already.”

“Also the sea is so stinky… if only the sea could just disappear and leave behind all the fish.”

Everyone had completely entered the dream, and even though they were cursing, they were gradually returning to their usual calm selves.

- Sora, Shiro, Steph, Jibril, Miko, Ino and Izuna.

They stepped on the floor individually, and the 「Setting (scene)」 in front of them constructed slowly.

Even though they were at the bottom of the sea the sky could be seen, and clouds were moving about on the water's surface.

The uneven terrain was re-flattened, and 「School buildings」 appeared on the sea floor originally filled with rocks and corals.

The schools of tropical fish swimming around them gradually transformed into nameless normal students (NPC).

In the blink of an eye a virtual stage known as the 「Underwater school」 was built.

That was a 「High school」 built in the same style as the other buildings around Oceando –

Glancing at their surroundings, beside Sora –

"What shocks me is that Her Majesty actually knows about 「Schools」… did she read about them in books?"

Plum who had appeared to have snuck into the game (dream) successfully, spoke.

Understanding the meaning behind Sora's glance, Plum smiled wearily, and explained bitterly.

"Haha… Oceando doesn't have anything like schools… what would those people need to learn anyway."

As the scene around them stopped changing, Sora and others began showing changes instead.

First – countless signs lit up, entering their field of vision.

"…? What is this?"

Steph wanted to touch the signs that appeared, but grabbed air instead, and Sora explained:

"That's the UI (User Interface)… the 「Command Selection Screen」."

- It was exactly like a status screen in a standard dating simulator.

It brought back memories, like the title screen of 「Toki○ Memorial」, but Sora complained instead:

"…Since you could generate something like this this perfectly, then you shouldn't have let us drown in the first place.

"Because this only causes any effect on the players… when the scenes are being constructed, it's actually the process of combining Sora-dono and Her Majesty's memories, something that took us quite a lot of effort to do, but –"

Plum spoke in shock all of a sudden:

"Where did Sora-dono get your information? I've never seen anything like that before."

Plum didn't know that Sora came from another world, and indicated curiosity at how he was able to imagine such things – but Sora merely ignored her.

"Speaking of which since what you're doing is reflecting the imaginations of the players, the settings should be rather easy to change right?"

"Ah, yes, because the spell is being constructed… so as long as Sora-dono wishes it anything can be changed."

Plum continued:

"But one's appearance, age and sex are unchangeable… please take care."

- The Empress was hibernating in wait of a 「Prince」.

If she were to fall in love only to realize that the person that had awoken her was completely different from the character in her dream, like a photo scam – she would probably resume hibernation.

They didn't have any problem with that, but what was important was:

"Since we can change our names, please set my name as 「Ko〇man」."

"…Nii, setting all base stats…to 573 is cheating…"[16]

Facing his sister's accusing gaze with her eyes half open, Sora shook his hand while chuckling in denial.

"Using official cheats are technically allowed according to the rules, and also if this cheat is used as long as you perform any actions you will be afflicted with neurosis, causing you to miss the entire first year and all the flags in it… so it does have its negative side effects!" (TL note: See what I mean by negative stats?)

"…Then Shiro will… use the name 「Se〇ponume」." [17]

"Um… is there any particular reason for that…?"

As they were conversing – Sora and others' appearances changed according to Sora's imagination made reality by the spell.

Sora's dressing was merely an extra uniformed suit over his usual T-shirt saying 「I ♥Humans」.

"…Oof, this clothing is rather stuffy."

Wearing a male school uniform as well – a ninety-eight year old man with bulging muscles spoke beside him.

"…A uniform that bulges tightly due to overly large muscles…I think I'm going to have nightmares tonight."

Sora spoke while averting his gaze from hell (Ino) over to heaven (playground) – which was essentially the female members of their posse.

Shiro who was standing on the other side of him wasn't wearing her usual full black uniform – but instead a brightly colored female uniform.

- Maybe because it was mixed in with the Empress' impressions as well, it was a sailor uniform slightly more revealing than Sora had expected it to be.

And around her were Izuna, Jibril and Miko who were wearing the same uniforms –

"…Miko-san's sailor uniform, really does look amazing…"

"Do you have something to say about it?"

Stroking her long golden hair, Miko spoke while wearing a sailor uniform identical to Shiro's.

Her twin tails lifted her skirt slightly as they shook about, and her beautiful legs underneath were extremely attractive, but –

"…Miko-san, how old are you?"

"Didn't anyone tell you that asking for a lady's age is extremely rude?"

"Oh, right… speaking of which the one that created the Eastern Union was Miko-san right?"

Miko's ears twitched slightly.

"You kept saying things like since you were matured or whatever, Izuna's eight years old but she's already matured, while the Eastern Union prospered rapidly within fifty years (half a century) – even when you leave out the time taken to take care of the entire Eastern Union, you at least have to be about fifty-eight –"

"Let me give you a piece of good news OK? Imanity (bald monkey). Werebeasts – especially in their

「Blood Devastation」 form, age extremely slowly.

Miko interrupted Sora’s accurate deduction, and spoke with a dazzling smile.

- After which a dangerous smile appeared on her face, and she spoke clearly:

“If you dare to call me 「Auntie」, you know what will happen, don’t you ♥”

“- Phew… and I was the one about to tell Miko-san some good news.”

Sora met her smile head on, and replied:

“Looks are everything! Miko-san gives off an air like she’s older than she actually is because of her actions and tone of voice, but appearance-wise you look no older than a beautiful twenty-year-old lady –which means actual age is no more than a title, which is what we Imanity believe.”

“…That is what you believe.”

Despite clearly hearing Steph’s words, Sora excellently ignored her, and pointed beside him.

“Also there’s someone here who is 「Over six thousand years old」, so there’s nothing to worry about right?”

“Ah, Master, to be precise I’m 「Six thousand four hundred and seven」 years old.”

Jibril who was looking at her garb curiously since earlier, replied with a smile on her face.

Her shirt was lifted up slightly by the wings on her waist, revealing a short snatch of bellybutton, while the rest can be omitted.

On the other hand –

“…Speaking of which, may I ask a question?”

“Hmm – is there a problem? Steph.”

“Why am I the only female along with you and Ino – that’s wearing male clothes?”

- That was true.

Shiro, Jibril, Miko and Izuna.

They were all wearing sailor uniforms, but only Steph was – wearing a male uniform identical to Sora and Ino’s.”

Sora nodded his head meaningfully, and explained his reasoning.

“Good question – this is what is known as 「To kill a general, first shoot his horse」.”

"…What?"

Sora spoke with a serious expression, and everyone's eyes were on him.

"- First, there are 「Two」 reasons why I didn't let everyone wear male clothing."

Sora continued while lifting up a single finger.

"First, if we're going to conquer the female lead, I want to have help from her friends – the girls."

"…You really say all these dastardly things without hesitation."

Miko spoke her thoughts on everyone else who was glaring at Sora coldly.

However Sora ignored her and raised another finger:

"Secondly – I considered the possibility that a trap like the Empress 「Never was interested in men」 in the first place might exist."

"…I did say earlier that the Empress was looking for a fertile male…?"

"There's insufficient evidence to prove that."

Sora rebutted Plum who objected while staring daggers at him as well, and continued:

"Next up is the reason why I let specifically Steph wear male clothing – Steph has strong communication skills, so she can be our scout for information."

If they were only looking at political power, Miko could be a stand-in for her as well.

But according to Sora's instinct, Steph was the correct choice as she could make friends easily.

"I want a male comrade that has the social skills and ability to collect information like Saotome-kun – but…" [18]

Sora turned to Steph and sighed.

"…But compared to Saotome, you're more of a… someone like Ijuuin…" [19]

"- What? I don't really understand…"

- A redhead with rather proper looks.

She looked like a rather high-classed handsome teenager – the male-dressed Steph tilted her head in confusion.

Her attitude was nonchalant as she hadn't particularly noticed her appearance, but she was proficient in both physical ability and studies, even being a decent homemaker.

She had social skills, a drive to get things done – and had a set of determined blue eyes.

And deep in her eyes, one could even get a glimpse at her overwhelming gentleness and resilient personality – she was quite literally a model teenager.

- To be honest.

Sora wanted to punch her, as she was the enemy of unpopular people (the world) – once again glancing at her riajuu appearance, Sora sighed. [20]

“…Ijuuin? Who’s that?”

“…It’s first-gen… don’t bother about it…” [21]

“…Speaking of which, how about we not bother about Gramps over here and just let Steph go talk to the girls?”

“What? No, for me to go talk to the girls – and about that… S-Sora and I –“

“…Ah, it appears the spell is complete.”

Part 4

“Hmm, so let’s play the opening cutscene all over again – after which I’ll infiltrate the Empress’ subconscious.”

Following Plum’s announcement, a giant screen appeared in the middle of the air.

The badly made advertising clip that had just played in their minds once again made an encore accompanied with relaxing background music.

Following the narrator’s descriptions, after photos of the school buildings and classrooms were shown on screen, the image cut to the courtyard, where a giant madder-red colored piece of coral that seemed to have branches extending in all directions was shown with the camera angle slightly tilted.

The narrator explained calmly.

“Marinal Kagayaki High… there is a legend that as long as one confesses under the magical coral, one will acquire 「True Love」.” [22]

Hearing these recycled words, Sora complained with his eyes half-opened:

“…Hey, I wouldn’t care if it was like a magical tree or something, but what the hell is a magical coral…?”

To confess under an ancient tree was somewhat understandable.

Confessing in the midst of bells ringing or on a slope with Sakura blossoms blowing around would be acceptable as well.

But no matter how you think about it, 「Under the magical coral」 just seems a bit too over-the-top, don’t you think?

“Even if you say that I can’t do anything about it… there aren’t any trees in the ocean…”

- Speaking of which stuff like corals would probably look disgusting up close.

The opening cutscene continued to play, disregarding Sora’s inner thoughts and protests.

- After a while.

The boring narration ended, and pop music began playing.

Under the pink-colored 「Magical coral」, a mermaid with blue hair flowing along with the waves appeared.

- The empress.

The uniform-wearing empress – Leila swam quietly under the giant red coral as though dancing.

Her colorful uniform covered up her firm body that was shaking from side to side unpredictably in the water brought out her natural sexiness and charisma even more, and the very action of her scaly tail sticking out from her short skirt while flapping about in the water was attractive.

The Empress' eyes carried a hint of melancholy, and she stretched her hand out to the sky as though earnestly waiting for something –

"La - ♪"

She began singing.

- Upon hearing her voice, everyone simultaneously inhaled sharply.

"Ah…!"

"Oh, this is… she really is a beauty, even her voice is exceptional."

Steph and Ino began praising her.

An Empress that could bewitch anyone through a single glance.

Her beautiful voice brought a sensation to the listener's soul that was almost like taking drugs.

…Except for Sora and Shiro.

Sora and Shiro stared at the screen in boredom.

"Even I'm beginning to think that there's something wrong with our taste…"

Ignoring her voice for now –

The song and video that was playing were completely mismatched with her sensual actions and melancholic expression.

But before that, the Empress wasn't suitable to wear sailor uniforms at all because she's too sexy.

It was like a thirty-year-old woman (laugh) pretending to be a female high school student –

"Well it's true that everyone's preferences are different… but you want me to conquer her?"

I can't seem to get excited… Sora took a small breath.

■「The First Day」■

- All of a sudden, the words 「The First Day」 appeared in front of everyone.

Sora and Shiro were undoubtedly already used to it, but Plum continued to explain it to the others.

“Um, I believe a few 「Commands」 should have appeared in front of everyone, if you use those you can perform specific actions… like giving presents and things like that.”

Hearing Plum’s explanation, Sora tilted his head in curiosity instead.

“It’s like that in theory, but this is a realistic romance game right? So there shouldn’t be a hidden affection meter…”

“…Nii.”

As Sora was complaining, Shiro quickly passed something to him.

“…Command…present…Nii, did your affection gauge rise?”

Shiro’s eyes appeared to be expecting something, while Sora smiled bitterly and replied:

“Sorry, sis, my affection for you is already at maximum levels, so even if you try nothing will –“

“So Master, if you allow me to, I will –“

Jibril gave him a gift as well.

Plum looked away from them and continued her expression.

“Also…among the commands displayed, there should be two heart shapes as well.”

Everyone carried out individual confirmations and found them almost immediately.

It was in the lower-half corner of a screen with multiple signs on it.

There was a normal heart shape and another heart shape with a 「+」 marked on it.

“That heart is the confession command…it’s up to you how you wish to confess, but if you choose this and get 「Dumped」, it will be regarded as a 「Loss」… while the one with a + on it is…”

“Your 「Love Magic」 right – a cheat command right, OK, I think I’ve got it… yep.”

Sora had figured out the system since earlier, and turned towards Ino.

“So Gramps, since you’ve married thirty wives, the amount of people you’ve slept with must be more than that right? So how about you use those skills that even Ka〇 Taka can’t beat to quickly conquer the Empress and get her heart.” [23]

“The way you put it is rather displeasing…”

Ino wrinkled his forehead, but after that –

“I’m looking forward to your lover’s skills that seem to be your pride, Hatsuse Ino.”

“…Good luck Grandpa, des.”

“Yes! As Miko-sama orders…!”

Hearing the two women’s encouraging words, Ino replied respectfully and turned towards Sora.

“…But Sora-san, I was quietly listening to you since earlier, all that stuff about shooting generals and horses, helpers, scouts for information and others seems pretty hard to comprehend.”

“…What?”

Sora replied with his forehead wrinkled, and Ino shrugged his shoulders and continued:

“…Could it be that Sora-san believes that ignoring women’s preferences and forcing one’s own preferences onto them – even stooping to the point of changing one’s appearance to suit them is 「Love」?”

…He got me, Sora thought.

“To be precise, that’s how it is in a 「Romance Game」.”

Noticing that Sora was unable to answer, Ino looked at him solemnly.

“Phew… so that’s how it is, it was a good idea after all to leave it to me after all, it seems that just like how being good at fighting games doesn’t make one a good fighter, mastering romance games doesn’t allow one to talk about real romance and love.”

- He was right, but Sora somehow felt angry as he realized that his self-confidence probably came from the fact that he’d slept with many women.

“Sora-san do you know why you’re a virgin – an unpopular, antisocial, incurable man now?”

“…Old man, don’t make me get Jibril to teleport you to the ends of the universe.”

Ino didn’t appear to be the slightest bit threatened by Sora’s devilish glare.

“Some say that 「Love is the art of reading hearts」 - if so, why can’t Sora-san do it?”

“…Hmm?”

- If it was 「Reading hearts」.

Then Sora who was way above himself (Ino) should be able to do it.

Ino's words carried absolute confirmation at Sora's ability with it as well, leaving Sora speechless.

"I see, there are many different ways to love, but… the end result is always to 「Convey one's feelings to the other」, and –"

Ino stared at Sora sharply.

- His eyes didn't carry any hint of condescension.

It wasn't a look of sarcasm, hate, pity, nor underestimation.

It was a look that Sora – knew all too well.

With the look in his eyes that Sora never wanted to see again in his original world – Ino continued:

"The words spoken by a liar that lives on mountains of lies do not have the power to convey one's feelings at all!"

No doubt about it, it was – a look of 「Distrust」.

"But, it's true, if it really is about reading hearts, there's only one way, which is –"

Ino spoke while glancing towards his own command screen.

"「Seize the upper hand」."

Unhesitatingly choosing the 「Confession Command」- Ino dashed forward.

""Eh-!?""

Leaving behind Sora and others who were still frozen in shock –

Using his physical ability as a Werebeast to the fullest, Ino launched a surprise attack with a blinding speed.

His footsteps even caused loud booming noises, while his eyes were focused only one thing.

Which was the Empress that was about to step into the school gates – Leila.

Ino yelled at the figure that was being surrounded by several NPCs:

"The pretty lady over there! Please wait!"

His voice was like a knight reporting his name on the battlefield, and hearing his booming voice, the Empress turned around slowly.

Her sapphire colored eyes spotted Ino – and she replied:

“Are you talking about me…?”

- Those few words alone were like a force of nature.

“…! Of course!”

For a moment, Ino forgot he was in a game.

Every word, sentence, action, and smile of the beauty in front of him was melting his soul.

But he shook his head in self-warning, and focused his strength at his abdomen. [24]

- There wouldn’t be a problem if he was to fall in love with her, or more appropriately, he needed to fall in love with her.

He clenched his jaw and focused his energy with a determined look in his eyes.

- But he couldn’t be consumed; he needed to consume the other –

“Oh beautiful lady, please forgive me for interrupting you suddenly, if it’s convenient for you – I would like you to hear a few words of mine.”

“Ah – and what would those words be?”

The Empress smiled sweetly.

Ino’s heart felt like it was being grabbed onto tightly just from those words.

He wanted to forget everything – at least, he was tempted to.

The Empress’ eyes, the Empress’ voice, the Empress’ expression, her snow-white neck.

The angle at which her fingers touched her breasts unintentionally, the shadows created by her waving hair –

Those things, he considered them priceless treasures…!

- Ino thought, there was a possibility –

The previous challengers were all consumed by the Empress’ beauty and were unable to even confess.

She had that standard of beauty, a radiance that was almost violent in nature.

In conclusion, in front of this woman, a normal young man wouldn’t even be able to open his mouth.

But Ino… replied with a smile.

- He wasn’t at ease; he was already at his limit.

Love isn’t about reading hearts – yes, love is a battle.

The action of 「Laughing」 was an act of war.

- It originated from how beasts would bare their jaws at their pray.

Ino calmly, carefully, solemnly kneeled on the ground.

- Love.

He raised his two palms towards the heavens and beat them on the ground violently as though in prayer.

- The so-called love.

He looked at the girl with a powerful gaze – it wasn’t a threat, but a silent declaration of war.

- Must be won with one’s own hands.

He clasped his hands that were plastered onto the floor onto his knees, and pressed his forehead sharply down onto the concrete, head, bones and all…!

- It was …

Impeccable.

A glorious –

“Please! I beg you to spend a passionate night with me -!”

- He kneeled and kowtowed.

-…

“”-What!?””

- Whose voices were those?

Or were those possibly everyone’s voices?

Sora and others didn’t need mentioning, as even the Empress was frozen in shock, however Ino continued, ignoring everyone else!

“Since the first time I saw you, my heart has been boiling like lava, please look! My sword is hard and erect like steel -!!”

“Eek…”

The Empress breathed sharply, and backed away continuously with a flustered expression.

While Ino increased his volume, and pressed his attack…!

“Oh, please forgive me, dear Empress of the ocean! It’s all because you’re too beautiful! Since the first time I saw you, I’ve been having this overflowing, unstoppable urge to hold you and penetrate you! Please forgive my burning feelings!”

“It’s a straight-up kowtowing strategy that doesn’t give the other party time to back down at all - !?”

Sora felt a sense of immense trepidation.

Was this the sure-win tactic of a man that has married thirty women!?

As the surrounding atmosphere dropped to absolute zero temperatures, Ino’s passionate kowtowing strategy was still being carried out in full.

“Please! I beg you! Please carry out intercourse with me! Please have passionate intercourse with me!”

“Eh? No, wait, um… that…”

Since she had begun hibernating, the Empress’ dreams had been interrupted countless times, and she had received countless confessions as well.

Even if she was really an Empress that had rejected all sorts of men, it was probably her first time receiving such a direct confession. She hurriedly attempted to run towards the school blocks.

But -!

“Please wait!”

(Grasps)

Ino’s muscular hand grabbed onto the Empress’ arm, stopping her in her tracks.

“No, hey, let go -!”

“I’m not going to! I won’t let go! I want you to feel the beating of my heart, the burning heat of my loins! My body is old and insignificant, but I will make you satisfied even if it costs me my life!!”

“Noooooooooo!?”

- They were speechless.

It was literally a crime – no, what was occurring in front of them was an act of complete pervertedness.

If a temperature below absolute zero existed, Sora and others spectating would definitely feel like they were in it.

“…No, but…”

Sora who was watching the events unfold from a safe distance asked Miko nervously:

“Did that old man use this method to get himself thirty wives…?”

“…No, I don’t know, why are you asking me?”

“No, unless those methods when used on Werebeasts actually…”

(How could it possibly work!? I’m not even there and I feel like refusing myself!!)

“No, wait, let go of me! I said let go of me!!”

The Empress began crying out mournfully, and finally managed to shake off Ino’s grasp.

After which she turned, cut through the crowds and disappeared into the school blocks with her tail flailing about.

“Please wait, Empress! EMPREESSSSSS!!”

Ah…ah… -

Ah… -

…Ah –

Ino’s mournful cries echoed in the clear blue ocean – and disappeared suddenly.

The rejected Ino lay motionless, appearing extremely depressed.

- Seeing his current state, everyone else had the word ‘Disappointment’ engraved in their hearts.

“…He can’t make it anymore right?”

“…”

- No one bothered to rebut Sora’s words.

“…B-but that doesn’t count as being dumped yet, doesn’t it?”

Ino did kneel down in pursuit of her love earlier, but the Empress didn’t officially reject his love.

So according to the system, the game – the dream should still continue…

Regarding Sora’s question, Plum replied somewhat hesitantly:

“…Before that, I think the real problem is whether that sort of action should be considered as a confession or not…”

Hearing Plum’s words, Sora nodded and said:

“- Anyway, let’s have some fun normally, select command…「Leave the school」.”

“…Nod.”

“…Why did you people choose this setting anyway?”

However, no one bothered to answer Miko’s question…

■「The Second Day」■

Immediately after they woke up, the date and the 「Attend School」 commands appeared in front of them.

As they selected the command, the scene immediately changed.

When they returned to their senses – Sora was already walking on the way to school with Shiro.

The activities that they had all done so far – eat breakfast, change into their uniforms, get out of the house.

Those were completely shortened out, and their memories of actually doing those tasks merely remained fuzzily in their heads.

"…Nii, good morning…"

"Good morning…since in this game we're under the 「Sibling Setting」 as well, we're allowed to be together from morning."

Not to mention that they were set to be in the same grade.

An eighteen-year-old and an eleven-year-old in the same grade – it could be somewhat dismissed as a result of continuous grade-hopping.

Just like that, as Sora, Shiro and the NPCs were going to school together, someone called out to Sora from behind.

"- Ah, Sora, g-good morning."

"Oh…?"

Turning around, Steph (male-dressed) was standing behind him.

Sora raised one hand in response to her greeting, and then spoke with his forehead wrinkled:

"…Good morning, speaking of which the fact that you're dressed like that but you're still speaking like a girl is somewhat disgusting."

"Didn't you set this yourself…"

Steph's eyes narrowed in a devilish glare, and she took out a thick stack of papers from her bag and passed them to Sora.

"…What is all this?"

"It's the Empress' personal information in this game and also her contacts… I've also done some slight research on the characters that may be acting as her friends in-game."

"- Eh? You've already done research!?"

Sora’s eyes widened in shock as he began flipping through the information.

Steph did say it was merely rough research, but what Sora saw was 「Information」 regarding tens upon tens of characters from their contacts to their hobbies.

- To have such staggering amount of information in only the second day of school.

She had a speed that even Saotome would envy, and Sora continued half-suspiciously:

“How did you research about this sort of thing?”

Steph widened her eyes as well in response, and replied nonchalantly:

“It’s exactly the same as a 「Social Network」, as long as you get close to a few of her attendants, you get all their information, including things from interests, dislikes, injuries, even relationships they’re in. Also there apparently won’t be any consequences for talking about private matters here unlike in the real world.”

- Cheh!

“What was that for!? Why did you go ‘cheh’ at me earlier!?”

Her communication abilities were stunning.

Although it had achieved the effects he had intended it to, but Sora felt anger first instead of gratitude at her superhuman social skills.

“Ah, I’m sorry, it was an accident… I-I’ll be using these as references, thanks for everything.”

Sora rallied once more and began comforting her.

“- A-about that, speaking of which, just now, earlier, that… did the 「Affection Gauge」 rise?”

Steph (male according to the settings) asked while twiddling her fingers shyly.

“…What?”

“No, the gift command earlier – “”””Steph-sama♪”””” – Ah!?”

A flirtatious voice sounded from behind her, and Steph let out a cry, falling onto the floor.

As she hurriedly turned, she saw a group of girls with heart shapes in their eyes struggling and fighting amongst each other to get to her.

“Steph-sama! Let’s walk to school together!”

“Hey you, don’t ask so chummy with her! Here, Steph-sama, this way –“

“Eh, wait…I haven’t finished – someone, someone help me ahhhhhhhh -!?”

Upon seeing Steph being dragged away by a group of girls, Sora responded by half-closing his eyes.

“…Just let yourself be chased to the ends of the earth.”

He let out a small choking noise, then left her behind and resumed his walk to school.

As he reached the school gates, he noticed Ino was still there in a kowtowing position.

■「The Third Day」■

Izuna used the 「Gift」 command on Sora.

What she gave was a can of mackerel.

However Izuna was drooling while staring at the can of mackerel, and she appeared to be undergoing an internal struggle.

Sora couldn’t help but consider giving up and going on the Izuna route instead, but he managed to control his urge.

- In school, he bumped into the Empress and Steph at the school gates, was there a flag being triggered?

But Sora didn’t know her yet, so he ignored her and continued towards the classroom.

Immediately as he reached – probably because she was set in the same grade as well – Plum walked over in a female uniform.

“U-um… why is everyone ignoring the Empress…?”

“Because we need to begin our assault only after we achieve the stats required to conquer the character in order to easily gain affection points.”

“…Early game…except for scripted flags…ignore everything…focus on raising stats…”

Shiro and Sora raised their opinions with focused expressions, while Plum looked somewhat troubled.

“…That’s how it works…?”

Ino was still kowtowing at the school gates.

■「The Fourth Day」■

Miko used the 「Ask on a Date」 command – on Sora.

He was stopped on the way to school, and Miko took the initiative.

"I'm pretty interested in this 「Sakura Coral Park」 set in the spring season, so would you like to go together?"

She appeared to be reciting lines off of the UI (User Interface), but it was the first time Sora had heard of the place.

"Eh? What's that? Where did you see that?"

"Really, you hadn't noticed? There's an icon shaped like a small book in the lower right corner."

"Ah… really. The Oceando Messenger – I actually fell behind Miko-san in a romance game of all things…"

"Heheh… so? Could it be that you're not interested in what Sakura corals may be?"

"Fine, I'll go, Shiro can follow along right?"

"…Mm, I want to… see."

"Since we're going, let's invite everyone else as well, Izuna, Jibril, Steph – does Plum want to go?"

"Master, there's a 「Make Bento」 command under the 「Hobbies」 command section, I'll make some for our visit."

"…Um, are you sure all of you haven't forgotten what we're here for…?"

Ino was still kowtowing at the school gates.

■「The Fifth Day」■

Today was the day that they were to select their clubs, and everyone chose the go-home club. [25]

Only Steph joined the students' council, and for some reason she was glaring hatefully at Sora.

- After school, Shiro was tugging on his sleeve, and he looked up –

"…Nii, over there."

She pointed at the Empress that appeared to be going home as well.

"A go-home flag…?"

"I think so, forget it, it's too troublesome, let's go home."

"… 「Going home together…if anyone were to spread rumors… it would be very embarrassing」."

"Hey sis, can you not say that line again?" [26]

- Memories from his past awakened.

The other party was his childhood friend, and as he nonchalantly invited her to walk home together, he heard that line instead.

"Thinking about it, I think that was the time when I stopped trusting people.

Plum appeared to be hurriedly saying something, but Sora ignored her and replied with "OK yeah it's very funny" dismissively.

Ino was still kowtowing at the school gates.

■「The Tenth Day」■

They were having a meeting in preparation for the sports meet next month.

Since it would probably end up with Jibril performing alone, they reached an unanimous vote that they would select the leave school command immediately after classes ended.

As they were stepping out of the school gates, Sora finally tried to use the 「Date Command」.

- And his target was Miko.

"Ah~ um, how about we all 「Go shopping」 together?"

"Why do you sound like you're reading from a script?"

"Nah, it's just a habit."

"Speaking of which wouldn't it be no fun if we were to go shopping without having anything to buy?"

"…I think there's…a food fest…"

"Alright, let's go, there should be wine right? Ah, does Izuna want to come along as well?"

"As long as there's meat or fish then definitely, des."

"Ah, I'll definitely go as well, Master."

He had planned to invite Steph, but possibly because she was busy with council activities, they didn't see her after school at all.

- Although they spent all their 「Money」, everyone got to try pretty delicious food.

Ino was still – never mind.

■「The Fifteenth Day」■

“- Everyone, do we really need to go to school?”

Hearing Sora’s words, everyone realized something.

After which their actions were very fast-paced.

Everyone began making plans in order to try out all the dating spots within their reachable radius.

Sora and Shiro dressed up carefully, wore dress suits and went to their meeting point, but –

“…Disappointed…”

Shiro sagged her shoulders in disappointment, while Sora helped her ask her question.

“…Miko-san… allow me to ask, why are you wearing that?”

Miko who had arrived on time was wearing a tracksuit and a pair of slippers, appearing particularly pathetic.

It was no different from an old man’s home clothing, but Miko shrugged her shoulders.

“Because there aren’t any straw shoes or skirts or pants. Although these may look cheap, they’re easy to move about in, and they’re comfy as well. Shouldn’t I be the one asking you why you’re wearing suits and dresses off for a hike?”

“Hey Jibril, could you tell me why you’re wearing a swimsuit over?”

“Eh? Because there was a clothing selection, so I just chose something that was the closest to what I usually wear.”

…On another note, according to Steph who was still going to school diligently, Ino was really still… never mind.

■「The Twentieth Day」■

- Everyone was just about bored of playing.

On a spur of the moment, Sora attempted to actually begin going to school.

Immediately after that, he noticed that for some reason a rumor had spread that 「Sora hurt Steph (male)」.

In order to find out what exactly was going on, he went to find Steph during recess, and –

“…!”

Upon seeing Steph, she glared at him fiercely and ran off.

“What’s going on here?”

“…The game’s…like this in the first place…”

The fact that 「Bombs」 would appear without the player doing anything was really the way the game was designed. [27]

But why would the bomb icon – appear on a male (by setting only)?

“Hey, Plum, there seems to be a bug with the system of the game.”

“…Compared to that, you’ve really forgotten the main aim of the game, haven’t you?”

Sora complained to her that the game should be properly debugged.

Plum looked to the horizon and let out a long, sad sigh instead.

- While – Ino, was still, kowtowing, at the school gates…

■「The Twenty-fifth Day」■

Nothing much happened.

It was almost as if the entire affair had become the second half of a summer holiday.

■「The Thirtieth Day」■

Nothing much happened.

■「The Thirty-fifth Day」■

Nothing much, basically.

■「The Thirty-ninth Day」■

- Let’s just go check out the school tomorrow.

Ino somehow began regaining realization of what was going on…

■「The Fortieth Day」■

- The sky was dyed with the dawn sunlight.

In front of the school gates that were bathed in the sunlight as well, there was a frail-looking, thin, stone statue that was covered in barnacles and appeared to have become one with the ground.

This solemn, serious, memorial that even let out a saintly air was –

"…C-could it be… the old man?"

Everyone took a breath in shock as they finally went to school once again.

- Sora and others who had retreated from the scene earlier… had nothing to say at that point.

His back even appeared to be emitting light…

He – unquestionably was more of it than anyone else – like a real man.

…This man had done it ever since the day the game started, to the Empress that passed by him without a word daily –

Kneeled and kowtowed.

Like a statue, he didn't budge at all.

Even until now, he continued to request.

No, his very appearance was his very best articulation, and he was letting out a single sentence.

Which was –

Let me have you - !!

Faced with his awe-inspiring image, Sora couldn't help but admit that he truly had the dignity of a man –

Ah… so love isn't about reading hearts.

- It's the act of proving one's love.

The old man succeeded in doing that.

If so – the fact that he didn't understand love wasn't surprising any more.

Sora swaggered towards the stone effigy – no, the true man within it, and his body was trembling uncontrollably.

"Too small – I'm so incredibly insignificant."

Compared to that man, what was he?

For a mere – he couldn't help but think of it so - 「Romance」, could he bear kneeling for forty days?

Sora could only say no.

He – Ino didn’t disguise himself, and shamelessly, fearlessly pulled out his heart and gave it to her.

Was there a love more sincere than this – no, there wasn’t!

“So… so this is… this is 「Love」…”

“…Absolutely…not…”

Sora spoke while almost at the point of tears as though he had reached some sort of spiritual awakening, while Shiro immediately rebutted him.

But – suddenly.

As though it was hiding from the sun – a shadow fell upon that holy statue.

Looking at the owner of the shadow that was swimming through the waters gracefully and appeared to be on the way to school –

It was – the Empress.

Her line of sight brushed past Sora and focused upon the sacred statue – no, focused on Ino.

- Could it be?

“…Impossible – it can’t be…?”

Miko who was looking from a distance couldn’t help but mumble to herself.

The Empress continued to approach Ino.

And then she clasped Ino’s cheeks lightly.

In that instant… as though it had finally recalled that it was a human being, the statue moved.

The barnacles, the floor and even the rocks and stones on it began to peel off.

The Empress’ hands gently support Ino’s cheeks and raised his head up, and as though receiving some divine guidance, Ino raised his head.

After which – she spoke with a voice that would enchant any listener –

She smiled a smile that was more valuable than any treasure on earth.

She spoke a single sentence.

“…It’s impossible for us to be together.”

- I knew it~…

Everyone’s inner thoughts seemed to overlap.

“- Ah…”

However Ino clenched his teeth and thought, it can’t end like this.

It was true – his love was rejected.

It was crushed into dust.

But now – since it’s come to this, there’s no other way -!

In order to fulfil Miko’s orders – Ino selected a command from the UI (User Interface).

- The heart shape with a 「+」 sign on it.

Which was – the command for Plum’s 「Love Magic (cheat)」.

And then –

“- Forgive me, Empress! Hnng~~~!!”

He exerted a force strong enough to rival a sumo wrestler.

- He grasped onto the Empress’ breasts firmly.

Yes – in order to complete Plum’s「Spell」, he used the command.

“- Eh!?”

In an instant, a red light began glowing around the Empress, and she opened her eyes wide in shock.

- At the same time.

“- Ah, ugh -!”

Complex patterns formed in Plum’s eyes, and she let out cries of pain.

Maybe because her powers were being taken from her, her black wings became blood-red in an instant, and she fell onto the floor in a sitting position.

“…Ah, aahhh…”

On the other hand the Empress let out weak noises with her breasts being fondled by Ino.

Her face was beet-red – even Sora and others could tell obviously that her heart rate was rising.

“We, we did it – now we can – !”

Plum spoke in a convincing manner.

“N-now, no matter how appalling of a person Ino-sama is, even with the fact that he only cares about the lower body, and no matter what kind of feelings the Empress may have… she will take those feelings – and recognize them as 「Love」!”

Plum seized her opportunity to insult Ino to the point of worthlessness while speaking tiredly.

- Sora was grumbling to himself that it was a really low form of magic as well.

But no matter by hook or by crook, the Empress would 「Fall in Love」.

Which means Game Over.

And then –

“- No, nonono, even if you want love it shouldn’t be this way, this is impossible, sorry!!”

- Just like that, she clearly rejected Ino.

The Empress waved her fins, and almost flew – towards the school buildings.

…

- …

…Sad~ depressing~ melancholic~… -

That sort of background music began playing in Sora’s mind.

That man was reduced to ashes.

He was burned white – no, his fur was white in the first place – burned into a white pile of ash.

The words 「Hatsuse Ino•Lose」 appeared in the world.

While in front of the gates, although he had been shattered and burnt –

- The man who was still maintaining his posture from squeezing the Empress’ boobs earlier – Hatsuse Ino turned into ashes.

Sora stumbled over.

He didn’t know what to say to him,

- But despite that, Sora felt like he had to say something.

“Old man – no… Hatsuse Ino, I’ve misunderstood you all this time.”

Sora’s voice was trembling as he searched for the correct words to say.

“You are truly a – great man, just for that woman… for that woman that can’t appreciate truly great things, you’re too great for her…”

But, even though Ino was about to turn into ashes and disappear –

He still spoke –

“- No, Sora-san… it was my love that wasn’t enough, for love is without sin.”

After finishing his sentence – as he was 「Rejected」, Ino would lose all his rights and be removed from the game.

He gradually began slowly changing colors from a dark, charred gray until he appeared almost transparent, and then –

“Ino…? Ino, hey, wait! You’re joking right!?”

Sora yelled while grasping onto Ino’s shoulders, but Ino’s body ignored him and gradually began disappearing from the game.

- Just like that, Hatsuse Ino’s high school life was over.

It was a high school life that was rather eventful, but ended up with him kowtowing all the while.

If he could go through it again, he wouldn’t leave behind any regrets –

- At this time, some weak-sounding closing transcript along the lines of that would probably be heard, but Ino instead –

“Phew… I have no regrets… if there’s a next time, I’ll do it, all over again –“

With a blissful smile on his face, blatantly refusing to speak such weak words, and disappeared from Sora’s arms.

- In complete silence, Sora looked up to the sky.

His face which was that of real man’s was covered in tears.

“Hatsuse Ino… how could a man like you – ugh!”

Ignoring the emotional Sora, everyone else appeared cold.

- This wasn’t just an awkward moment.

Ino wasn’t dead, nor had he disappeared.

He was merely brought out of the dream – and returned to the world outside the game.

But Sora was so emotional that his body was shaking uncontrollably as though he had lost an irreplaceable brother-in-arms.

“How could this be -…!!”

Sora yelled to Plum who was looking at him coldly as well with a tone that suggested he was about to vomit blood.

“What is this!? Wasn’t that a sure-fire way to win!? That man – he even sacrificed his aesthetics!! Why did this happen even after using 「Cheats」, why… why – didn’t the Empress let him in!!”

“- No, it’s not that… w-with the way he was acting any sort of magic wouldn’t be able to help, probably…?”

- Plum’s words did make a lot of sense.

Miko suddenly recalled something Plum had said.

To fall in love with someone like that, even a rock would have a better chance against him.

But -…

Just as Miko revealed a thin smile, Sora knelt and began pounding the floor beside her emotionally.

“What kind of joke is this!? Is there anyone that’s more of a 「Man」 like him – do you agree? Shiro, Miko-san, Jibril!”

Sora yelled, almost roared at them.

The three of them that were called out merely –

- Nodded in approval.

“…Eh, eh~~?”

Steph was so shocked that she stepped back upon seeing them nod their heads.

On the other hand, Plum was utterly stunned by Sora’s angered stance –

She hurriedly attempted to comfort him.

“P-please calm down… t-this is just a really extreme example… I’ll ask Amira-sama to return Ino-sama, I just want Sora-dono to try the game properly one more time –“

Speaking those words –

She looked over at Sora's face –

And Plum –

"- …!?"

Her heart was crushed.

No, more correctly she thought it had been.

The person there was – not the Sora from earlier.

It wasn't the emotionally charged, begging, pleading man from earlier.

It wasn't the cheerfully laughing, carefree man that had listened to Plum's request.

The person there was – someone else that Plum didn't know.

A man with the eyes of a hunter that pitied the 「Prey that had fallen into the trap」.

The man spoke a single sentence with a cruel, strange tone:

"Again? – Why?"

- Because –

"…We've…already won…"

"- Eh…?"

The man stood up nimbly with a gaze that didn't carry any warmth, and Shiro followed suit.

No – Shiro as well…Plum didn't know her – she was a girl with eyes at absolute-zero temperatures.

Faced with their sudden, drastic change – Plum took a step back.

Plum didn't understand the two of them.

While Steph, Jibril, Miko and Izuna… they all knew.

The ones that didn't know could just die –

They just had to stumble upon them of all people – Sora and Shiro – these two siblings –

And those unknowing ones were Plum and others that stood against them.

They would only appear when their plan to drive the enemy into the corner has been completed.

- 「The most vicious enemy」- 『Kuuhaku』.

"- That's enough, Miko-san, Jibril."

Sora turned around and asked while looking behind him.

"Yeah, we're done playing, it's complete."

"I've already confirmed it; I'm ready anytime – just waiting for your command."

Seeing the two of them nod in approval, Sora spoke in an emotionless voice:

"Do it, Jibril."

"- Your wish is my command."

Jibril took a deep bow, and spread her wings.

- Just like that.

The spell that had been held together by tens upon tens of Dhampirs – the 「Magic (Game)」 that was interfering with the Empress' dreams.

Just like blowing daffodil seeds into the wind, it was scattered easily – and the scenery around them shattered.

Chapter 4 - Wild Card/The Fool

Part 1

The surrounding space exploded.

And Amira, who was spectating the game from the real world, got the brunt of the impact.

"…Eh?"

- Plum and Amira were frozen in shock as they saw that everyone had broken out of the dream world and woken up.

The reason why they were surprised wasn't simply because Jibril had easily shattered a spell that had been constructed by tens upon tens of Dhampirs that had recently consumed blood with the force of her will alone.

It was because of what Sora said as he stood up.

"- Alright, checkmate, we win."

"…Eh, about that, Amira doesn't really get the situation~ ☆"

Amira spoke with a stiff smile.

However, Sora and Shiro told her nonchalantly:

"…The rules didn't say we can't… 「Save and Quit」…"

"In other words you never said that we couldn't leave the game until every one of us was rejected, so there shouldn't be a problem with us 「Quitting」 the game for now… you have to uphold the 「Pledges」 as far as you can, you know!"

Sora replied impatiently, and spoke to everyone else who had just woken up:

"Alright, Jibril, we're done here so restore the air."

"- I obey."

Jibril nonchalantly began drawing out the outline of a spell with her fingertips.

- Suddenly, a gust of strong wind attacked the Empress' room.

In an instant, the water parted and inside the room – air began expanding.

"…Eh…?"

Plum and Amira were completely stunned, while Jibril smiled thinly.

“Pardon me… I just restored the air that I compressed into a bubble earlier to its original state.”

In the room, the air continued to expand, pushing and splashing apart the waters.

“- Cough -! …Phew…ugh…hah.”

- She hadn’t said anything since earlier, when they were in the dream.

Miko who had been pretending to be calm since earlier, suddenly revealed an expression as though she was in pain.

Breathing fresh air that she hadn’t got the chance to breathe in a long time, her shoulders heaved up and down almost as if she was laughing.

In an instant, steam began rising from her completely blood-red body.

- She revealed the truth straightforwardly.

“To bear water pressure twenty times higher than normal with a body of flesh and blood for such a long period of time… it feels pretty uncomfortable even after using 「Blood Devastation」.”

Miko appeared to be at the verge of collapsing, experiencing a liberating reaction from the overbearing pain instead.

However, she strengthened her will, sat cross-legged and cupped her face in her hands while smiling.

“- Eh?”

Plum, Amira and Steph appeared completely clueless as to what was going on.

Sora didn’t appear to pay any attention to them, and instead he continued emotionlessly as if he was wearing a mask:

“- But 「Due to the water pressure, blood won’t flow out of the body」 - so even if she used 「Blood Devastation」 it would be undetectable, which was why we weren’t noticed and we were able to listen to your heartbeats to our heart’s content – thank you very much, Miko-san, please give us your verdict.”

- Miko’s expression was…

“…You really like ordering people around huh… ah, forget it.”

Miko thought from the deepest recesses of her heart 「Luckily these people are on our side」, and replied with a thin smile.

“That Seiren over there – she doesn’t want to awaken the Empress at all.”

- Hearing her words, Amira appeared visibly shaken.

And then… hearing her next sentence, she positively froze in place.

“Next up we have Sora’s deduction – all that about complying with the Empress’ 「Bet」 was a lie as well – ah~ and…”

Upon seeing Plum and Amira’s reactions, she appeared genuinely happy, and smiled bitterly.

Miko looked towards Sora gently and continued:

“All that stuff about you being just her type, being a handsome guy and all that, those were all lies as well.”

“I realized that long ago - …dammit.”

Miko laughed cheerfully upon seeing his reactions.

And then – as though she was looking down upon Plum and Amira.

“…Did you really think being in the sea would be able to seal off my senses?”

She spoke painfully, but with the highest degree of mockery, and laughed with a twisted smile on her face.

“- The fact that I’m the 「Full Representative (Strongest) 」 of the Werebeasts isn’t a fluke, you know.”

Sora tried extremely hard so as to not show how hurt he was, and looked away instead.

“Yes, Master, same goes with me.”

Jibril replied while kneeling reverently at Sora’s feet and meeting his gaze.

“Plum’s spell actually did work properly, as in that it did make the Empress fall in love with others.”

- After which – it was Plum’s turn to freeze.

“- There’s no question that it worked properly, and the Empress was actually affected.”

- Was there a possibility that it was a fake?

Sora confirmed it with her wordlessly, but Jibril laughed and replied:

“Please don’t worry, that’s the reason why you let Miko-sama experience it herself, didn’t you?”

Sora replied her with a smile, and lastly – turned towards Shiro.

They didn't need any form of verbal communication –

"…Mm…memorized…everything…"

- With this sentence alone, Shiro fulfilled all of her brother's requests.

Seemingly satisfied with everyone's answers, Sora nodded.

He still had a cheerful smile on his face.

Above that smile however – was a sinister shadow created by his fringe and an unbelievably sharp gaze.

With a gaze that could make anyone feel as if they were being glared at by a wild beast, he spoke:

"- Hey you, Dhampirs and Seirens (you bastards), did you really think that you could use us as 「Food」?"

Hearing those words, Plum and Amira's gazes shifted slightly.

If they really thought that sort of suspicious action wouldn't be noticed by Sora that he was 「Exactly correct」 - that would be too –

"Eh? Huh? Um, well, what's going on?"

"…?"

Steph and Izuna still didn't appear to understand what was going on.

They looked at each other in disbelief.

But Sora didn't appear to want to explain any further, and instead clapped his hands and turned to leave.

"Alright, we're going back, Jibril, take us to the beach."

"I obey."

Jibril spread her wings and her halo began spinning, while everyone hurriedly got in contact with her.

"Eh? Um! P-please wait!"

Plum hurriedly ran over as well –

"You're pretty observant, Dhampir – can you stop acting the errand girl (victim) now?"

What welcomed her was – Sora’s thin smile, which caused a chill to run down her back.

- Amira spoke.

“Eh~? Ino-sama~ Is 「Still here」~! Is it really alright to leave this early~ ♥”

Beside Amira, Ino was lying motionless, and everyone looked over at him.

Izuna began looking uneasily at Ino and Sora –

But Sora replied casually:

“Yeah, it’s fine.”

“Because…the consequences if you do anything to Ino – you know them very well, don’t you?”

Amira’s eyes grew wide in shock, and Sora laughed mockingly.

“Acting like an idiot in front of me – you’ve got to have a limit somewhere when you underestimate others, outsider.”

Sora turned around.

“- We’ll be back, Seirens, and don’t forget that the price for looking down on 「Us」 - is great indeed!”

After which Jibril teleported them out, only leaving behind Amira and Ino.

Part 2

They were back at the seaside.

The sun had set long ago, leaving behind a reddish moon and countless stars – and a beach lit up by bonfires.

Amongst the crashing of the waves and the explosions of the fireworks on the bonfires, Sora spoke cheerfully:

“Oh, Shiro, it’s almost done roasting right?”

“…Tropical fish…can we eat it…?”

“It’s a saltwater fish called 「Lelite」, I heard it tastes pretty good.”[28]

- Everyone was teleported from Oceande back to the seaside by Jibril.

Since they had teleported a large amount of seawater with them, they were currently grilling the fish that were swept along as well.

“Hah -! …This stuff is usually what I eat as side-dishes with alcohol after work anyway… if only it was –“

Miko finished her drink in one gulp, ate her entire fish after which Sora continued her sentence.

“If only it was 「Fried tofu skin」 - am I right?”

“- How did you know that’s my favorite food? Did I mention it?”

Ignoring the shocked Miko, Sora and Shiro began laughing.

And a few paces behind that peaceful scenery –

“W-what is this… what’s going on?”

Steph still appeared to not have understood what was going on, and was asking herself this question.

Beside her Izuna was looking down, speechless.

While further ahead – Plum was silent as well.

Sora glanced at Steph, and spoke while chewing on a piece of grilled fish:

“It’s nothing – it’s just that Plum wanted to trick us, that’s all.”

- As Steph was looking wide-eyed over at Plum, Sora continued as though in reply to her query:

“You’re going to ask when did I realize that – right? Plum.”

…No, he was speaking to Plum who was looking at the ground – and he continued mockingly.

Upon seeing Plum lift her head up in trepidation, he smiled bitterly and continued nonchalantly:

“It was 「From the beginning」 - your story was pretty suspicious from the start.”

As though imitating Sora, Shiro, Miko and Jibril sneered as well.

- The Dhampirs and Seirens had a relationship of mutualism.

And their relationship was crumbling due to the Empress entering hibernation.

Plum did not rebut Jibril’s words at the time – but…

Sora smiled bitterly again as though he had just heard a bad joke, and continued:

“「Since we’ve created a form of magic to awaken her, please help us」 - hah, that’s impossible.”

“…Eh? W-why is that?”

Steph was the only one that hadn’t caught on, while Sora passed a stick of grilled fish down –

“Pretending to have a sure-win method in order to cheat us into playing a game where we have no chance of winning, causing us to lose everything, doesn’t this sound like an extremely profitable method to you? Wouldn’t you do the same?”

“-…”

Steph’s face twitched instinctively upon hearing Sora who was uttering such cruel methods with a smile on his face.

“That’s true, but there’s still something that 「Worries」 me.”

Sora spoke while chewing a grilled fish:

“I couldn’t seem to tell whether Plum was lying, and Izuna who was in the same room couldn’t detect it either – ah, Izuna, aren’t you going to eat the fish?”

Sora held out a stick of fish while recalling the night when they first encountered Plum.

“…No thanks, des.”

Izuna shook her head slightly.

Miko who was drinking wine opposite them – closed her eyes and shook her head as well.

“So just in case she really was lying I even took her to Miko – but she still wasn’t lying.”

If Jibril was on alert, magic that could conceal a person’s lies would be revealed instantly.

So in front of the strongest Werebeast 「Miko」, any lies would be completely exposed, or at least that was what Sora had thought.

Sora began grilling another piece of fish over the fire.

“But what Plum casted back there really was - 「A magic that could make people fall in love」.”

Under the glow of the fire, Sora appeared to be genuinely enjoying himself.

However, he then took on a sinister smile and continued:

“So she really had a spell that could guarantee victory – but why ask for our help then?”

“Essentially, w-what that means is, she really wasn’t lying?”

So that would mean that she really needed Sora and the others’ help -?

Hearing Steph’s question, Sora began twirling a fish stick and replied:

“Yes, she wasn’t lying – and that’s 「The source of the problem」.”

- Sora looked down at Shiro who was at his knee-height, and she replied:

“…UTC (Universal Time Coordinated) 6/20 22:42…「Nii」…”

As though she was a recorder, she recited his words out perfectly –

“…「If we win the game, what will we get in return?」…”

Shiro adhered to the accurate time displayed on her phone from their 「Original World」- to organize her memories, even 「Completely memorizing」 his pitch as he spoke those words. She spoke Sora’s previous words completely accurately, just like a 「Replay」, causing everyone there to widen their eyes in shock.

“- And in reply to this, what did Plum say?”

“…UTC (Universal Time Coordinated) 6/20 22:43…「Plum」…”

She emotionlessly, calmly –

"…「Um… we will reward you with thirty percent of Oceande's underwater resources, and permanent good relations between our nations… a-and… um… I-I will do whatever you wish.」..."

This time she 「Replayed」 Plum's words and Sora smiled bitterly upon hearing it.

"Exactly – right 「Here」, she wasn't lying – but 「There was also no truth」."

Sora pointed the stick he was playing with previously at Steph.

"Steph, didn't you have something to say about us having to bet 「Everything」 in their game?"

"Y-yeah… because they're requesting for our help, aren't they?"

"Yes, you're correct."

"- Eh, huh?"

Sora chewed on his fish while nonchalantly uttering shocking revelations, and continued:

"I shot your protests down only because I needed to gather the necessary information. In apology, I'll explain why you're feeling such incongruity."

At that moment Steph's incongruity could only be described as she felt 「Something wasn't right」, and that was –

"This 「Game」 - is like a 「Horse race」."

"H-horse race? The kind where you bet money for horses to win?"

Sora nodded in relief at the fact that this world had horseracing as well.

"Horse racing is to let horses race, a 「Game (Gamble)」 to predict which one will win… but in its most basic form it's just the act of letting horses race against each other – which is also a 「Contest between the riders」 isn't it?"

To be precise, what he meant was –

"Horse racing is - 「A gambling sport created from a rider's sport」 - a double-layered game."

"The riders (us) race against each other (romance game) to win the Empress' love."

And –

"On the other hand, the resources and relations given as rewards by Amira and Plum is a 「Prize」 merely directed at the aim of「Awakening the Empress」- racing and horse racing (gambling) are clearly two different games, but we were forced into the game as both horses and gamblers – of course we would feel something wasn't right."

…Steph inhaled sharply, realizing what was going on.

According to Sora's example, they were the riders in a horse race.

But they were forced to bet all they had on themselves - 「Also」 being forced to take part in a second game.

And Sora appeared to read Steph's thoughts…

- He shook his head and said "That's not the problem."

"So if this is a horse race, where did the riders' (our) – 「Prize」 for the competition go?"

Sora looked evilly at Plum.

"…Huh, it's the love of the Empress of course… allowing her to wake up?"

"- If you make the Empress fall in love with the person, the Empress would love the person forever? And she would wake up for her prince? – This doesn't make sense at all, and only the Empress benefits right? Where's the 「Equal」 reward for the winner?"

Finally, Steph found the 「Source」 of her incongruity.

Resources, good relations, and Plum's free will – none of them sounded like what the Empress would've bet.

So, the game that allowed the Empress to hibernate after 「Swearing by the Pledges」.

The 「Bet」 of equal value to both parties – to be given to the victorious rider –

- Regarding that reward –

- She hadn't mentioned it all!?

Miko laughed bitterly and began playing with her fish stick as well.

"This series of games has two sides to it, but when Sora mentioned 「The rewards for winning」, the Dhampir over there intentionally avoided the two-facedness of it, so she didn't lie."

She smiled and continued.

"But even though she didn't lie – it doesn't mean she was telling the truth."

Miko immediately sensed something in Plum's heartbeat that told her 「I was found out」, and she smiled again thinly.

Sora spoke in an exaggerated fashion as though deep in thought –

“Alright, here’s where the 「Problem」 comes in – why couldn’t she mention the two-facedness of the game?”

Sora looked at Plum while twirling the stick in his hands and continued:

“Before we reached the sea floor – the place where you thought you could seal Miko-san and Izuna’s senses, you ignored the topic, why couldn’t you just say something like 「Amira said there won’t be any risk」?”

At this time Jibril who was busily preparing the fish and piercing them on sticks behind Sora passed him a fish stick that was coated in salt, and continued for him:

“- Because as long as she were to say that it would be 「Lying」… right?”

She smiled thinly, having answered the question.

Sora nodded, so what that meant was – Sora glanced at Shiro meaningfully.

“…UTC (Universal Time Coordinated) 6/20 04:28…「Plum」…「Please save our species!」…”

Nibbling on her fish lightly, Shiro skilfully - 「Replayed」 Plum’s initial words.

“If the words 「Our species」 wasn’t a lie – that would mean she really wanted us to save the Dhampirs.”

Which would mean –

“Which means – only – save the Dhampirs – so what should we do?”

Sora ignored Steph whose eyes were wide as marbles.

He flicked the stick he was playing with earlier – towards Plum who was sitting on the beach, and it stuck in the sand beside her.

“Alright, so we have all the materials we need for the verdict, don’t we?”

Sora began throwing stick after stick in her direction in the same fashion.

“There are three questions. And, only one conclusion.”

Looking over at the beach sand that had three sticks lodged in it, Sora spoke to Plum.

“- Are you prepared for this? Plum.”

As though in reply to Sora’s words.

- Under the light of the bonfire, the red moon and the stars.

Four pairs of equally mysterious eyes each began exhibiting a unique glow.

The first to react was Miko.

“- Why would you avoid talking about anything related to the two-facedness of the games?”

Miko threw out a stick at a speed that broke the sound barrier, hitting the first stick Sora threw, causing it to split into halves.

“Because you can’t lie.”

After Sora replied, Jibril was the next to act.

“Why would you request for our help even if you clearly have love magic?”

Jibril shot out a stick that broke the sound barrier as well, hitting Sora’s second stick – crushing it into pieces.

“Because Plum can’t lie.”

Sora replied, and the last to react was Shiro who was sitting on his lap.

“…Getting to the bottom of it… why – can’t you… tell a lie?”

The stick Shiro threw drew an arc in the air and hit the center of Sora’s third stick… connecting the two.

“Because if she lies – she would be exposed.”

- Exactly.

“If this is a 「Horse race」, then one mustn’t forget – each of us is betting on different horses.”

The Seirens bet on – the Empress.

The Dhampirs bet on – Sora and the others.

Two games, two aims.

Combining all the conclusions they had made.

Yes, there was - 「Only one」 conclusion.

“The Seirens plan to use 「The Empress’ hibernation game」 to 「Feed on the Imanity」.”

“What -!”

Steph was the only one shocked by this.

The Seirens had done what Sora had said initially.

Pretending that the game they were participating in would be a sure win, to lure Sora and the others – the full representatives of Imanity into their game.

In order to get new 「Materials for reproduction」- in this case the Imanity, to avoid the crisis their species was in.

But –

“The Dhampirs took advantage of this plan to betray the Seirens – they plan to 「Free the Dhampirs」.”

Yes – Plum did want the Empress to fall in love and awaken from her slumber.

While Amira – did not.

“Since Werebeasts were present she couldn’t lie, but since she had another plan entirely she couldn’t reveal the truth either.”

Once again, Steph was the only one who remained speechless.

But – as though requesting everyone to stop, Sora raised up one hand.

- As though to say 「The fun has only just begun」.

“Alright, so let’s all recall, what was the 「Prize」 if the Empress were to win the game?”

Sora smiled at Plum genuinely, and he looked away.

After which – under the glow of the moonlight, four pairs of sharp and unusual eyes began discussing.

“Would that bet let Amira – let the Seirens choose maintain their current situation over awakening their Empress?”

A pair of bewitching golden eyes, Miko smiled thinly.

“Would that 「Bet」 let Plum – let the Dhampirs achieve freedom if they were to win it?”

A pair of cold amber eyes, Jibril smiled mockingly.

“…Regarding the survival of the Seirens…something that could return the rights of the Dhampirs…”

A pair of emotionless ruby eyes, Shiro smiled sympathetically.

Each one of them spoke in order, and a pair of obsidian eyes, Sora emotionlessly – revealed his conclusion.

“What the Empress bet was –「Everything she had」… am I right?”

- Plum bent her head down while Steph inhaled deeply.

Back when the current Empress first entered her hibernation, she wasn’t the Empress yet – which meant she wasn’t a 「Full Representative」.

But now it was different.

Now regarding the 「Bet」, as long as they were to fulfill the victory conditions – they would win all the Seirens had as well.

- Including the Race Piece as well, winning 「Everything」 just as the bet implied.

Sora smiled bitterly again, completely ignoring Steph.

He casually uttered words that made Steph question her own hearing.

“I’ve deduced everything up to this point before we even reached the beach.”

“- What?”

“But…since I didn’t have enough evidence, I decided to go to Oceande anyway.”

Sora sounded like he was joking, but his voice carried a hint of seriousness as well.

“We don’t get to go to the beach very often, so we definitely have to enjoy it – which is to say…”

As he said this, Sora flashed an unbelievably cruel smile in the direction of Plum.

In a single breath – he provided the solution to the rest of the riddle.

“We brought you to the beach in broad daylight to weaken you.”

“We let Miko-san and Jibril pretend to fool around to test whether 「Blood Devastation」 could be disabled underwater.”

“We also made Jibril venture forth to the oceans in order to confirm the location of Oceande.”

“The strain of using 「Blood Devastation」 the entire day was partly alleviated by Shiro who was fondling Miko-san until nighttime.”

“We didn’t wait for the 「Reception Boat」 that could very likely be a trap, and instead we proceeded using Jibril’s teleportation.

“We forced you, Plum, into a situation where you had to top up on fresh Seiren blood to allow us to breath underwater and part ways with us; while Jibril used that time to compress and save the air that we brought there; casting extra preventive methods on Miko-san as well to prevent your underwater breathing magic from taking effect; allowing us to meet Amira with her Werebeasts senses fully awakened.

“- That’s it. Do you get it now?”

…

… -

- Steph and Plum were both shocked to the point of speechlessness.

While Sora was nonchalantly checking on whether his fish was grilled properly.

“It was impossible for you to 「Not lie at all」 before the game started, since you had to make us swear 「Everything we had」 on the pledges, and to expose your lies Miko-san had to be – in a condition where she couldn’t be affected by your suspicious magic.”

A magic that allowed them to speak and talk underwater –

And the caster was Plum who was confirmed to be an 「Enemy」 as well, so there was a high risk of her managing to cheat their sensory devices.

After uncovering all the solutions, Sora continued:

“The Seirens and Dhampirs may be different – but have you forgotten? They made us bet everything we have on ourselves, taking part in both a horse race and a gamble – so we have a sweepstake as well.”

- Exactly.

“- A sweepstake of 「Cheating all of you and allowing us to take victory」.”

“Ah, Plum, you’re quite something, that’s a strategy rather suitable for a weakling, no doubt a level of intelligence only achievable by the race that had all their power taken by the 「Ten Pledges」. Since even if Amira’s evil plot were to succeed and Imanity were to be used as 「Food」, the Dhampirs could still survive, as let’s say the Empress was actually awakened –“

Sora clapped in genuine admiration, not carrying any malice.

“What made the Empress fall in love was your magic and not us, so you alone won”

- Even managing to deduce Plum’s reason for joining in the game as well, Sora continued.

“Just a disclaimer, I don’t praise others, I just genuinely think that – this is a great strategy.”

She had managed to create a situation where she would win no matter what happened.

Also she virtually didn’t need to do anything except sit back while others do the work.

It was an ideal method of victory, but –

“You left out one thing!”

“- Eh?”

Plum lifted her head up.

“Didn’t you realize? The problem here isn’t because your plan was revealed, nor was it because you hid the fact about the true 「Reward」 we receive when we win the game in order to free the Dhampirs; and neither is it because – your magic can’t awaken the Empress.”

Sora’s mouth twitched at a corner.

And then he spoke as ironically as he could:

“It was because Amira assured us that we 「Absolutely couldn’t」 awaken the Empress.”

“-…Ah!”

Plum inhaled sharply.

Because of that, everything made sense.

Why – Ino couldn’t beat the game –

Plum’s magic worked properly.

Jibril confirmed as well that the magic unquestionably achieved its effect on the Empress.

But despite this, the Empress did not awaken.

Which would mean –

“The condition to awaken the empress - 「Isn’t making her fall in love」.”

-…Only gnawing noises could be heard.

Those were the sounds of Plum clenching her jaw, while Sora continued:

“Amira knew that from the start, as no matter how much you beg her she would never give you 「An actual opportunity to awaken the Empress」, because it would be a huge blow to the Seirens – you understand that right?”

Sora even kept his smug smile.

“The Seirens that you’ve been looking down on since earlier – even took your betrayal into consideration.”

“…-!”

Plum collapsed onto the beach in a sitting position, unable to believe that the Seirens that she had always looked down upon on had tricked her.

However Sora continued to add fuel to the fire.

“A strategy befitting of a weakling, an excellent strategy. But – in the end it’s all just futile.”

- Exactly.

Even if the strong were to use the knowledge (weapon) of the weak, they wouldn’t be able to exercise its full potential.

Because the weak had something they didn’t stemming from self-pity –

Stemming from their weakness – cowardice.

Sora’s expression changed once again as he stopped smiling, instead continuing solemnly:

“The natural enemy of the strong is the weak, but the natural enemy of the weak is not the strong – it is the ones that are even weaker.”

The weak – the man that was the very personification of this term began approaching Plum dangerously.

He crouched down, meeting her exact line of sight, and spoke softly and directly:

“An idiot that knows he’s an idiot – is even harder to deal with than an idiot that thinks he isn’t.”

- Whoever that was referring to, Sora chose not to reveal.

“Alright – checkmate.”

- Plum’s face was pale.

Originally only Sora’s bunch had accepted her terms.

But since they had saw through her deception and interrupted the game, Plum had no other choice..

In order for the Seirens to survive, they could only devour the Dhampir’s 「Hidden last living male」.

Since they had confirmed that the Dhampirs had betrayed them, they would definitely do it.

- If so, the Dhampirs would be the first to 「Checkmate」.

And after the Dhampirs turn extinct, the next up would be the Seirens.

The Seirens – needed to find a partner that would allow them to carry out reproduction.

But what they needed in return for that was the partner’s 「Life」, so of course no one would agree to it.

- Just like that, the Seirens would reach 「Checkmate」 as well.

In order to survive, they could only unconditionally surrender and become -「Domestic slaves」.

“Plum, do you know what the ultimate way to win a game is?”

He had a devilish smile on his face – that could make anyone tremble in fear.

“- It’s 「To win without fighting」. Even if we don’t win the Empress’ game, we still win.”

After which it was something that dragged Plum into the depths of hell – a smile.

“Trying to beat the Imanity with 「A weakling’s strategy」, you all are too inexperienced – rookies (beginners).”

- One move.

He was a man that had the survival of two species in his control in just one move.

He laughed creepily, sinisterly and continued.

Part 3

“Alright, you should have got the gist of it, so…”

Sora appeared restless.

Looking closely, Shiro who was sitting in his lap appeared awkward as well –

“Hmm? Master, is something the matter?”

“- W-where’s the toilet?”

…

Sora asked with a pitiful expression that completely shattered the serious situation from earlier.

“The toilet you speak of… is the chamber where Imanity excrete –“

“What kind of toilets are there other than that!”

Sora yelled while pointing at everyone else.

“Speaking of which what kind of inhuman bladders were you all born with! Being by the sea for an entire day, diving into the ocean itself, coming back to the beach at night, even eating fish, a normal person would be at his limit by now!”

“…N-Nii…S-Shiro is…”

Shiro signaled with tears in her eyes, while Miko laughed heartily:

“Beautiful ladies don’t do that sort of thing, although I don’t really understand how you feel, but shouldn’t it be alright as long as you find somewhere nearby to take care of business?”

- Not counting Jibril for now, Miko-san is a 「Living Being」 right –

Sora stood up, sensing that it wasn’t the time for such comments.

“W-we – no, I’m going to the toilet, Shiro’s going to pick flowers!”

Sora suddenly ran off while carrying Shiro.

“…N-Nii – d-don’t… shake…”

“Ah! This is the beach so there should at least be some 「Seaside Teahouse」! Where is it!?”

Sora and Shiro noisily ran off.

Leaving behind the perfectly silent beach.

-…

There were only the noises of the waves and fireworks exploding.

“Alright, now we just have to wait for them to surrender unconditionally. I’m tired, so I’ll be heading back first.”

Miko appeared extremely tired, and she stood up in preparation to leave.

“Ah, wait a minute! What should we do about Ino-san!”

Steph asked hurriedly, having finally come to terms with the situation.

- She understood that the Seirens wanted to take the Imanity as food.

She understood that Plum wanted to take advantage of their plan to free the Dhampirs as well.

She also agreed with the fact that Sora had saw through everything and was on a whole new level above them.

But –

The Seirens still possessed a card known as 「Hatsuse Ino」.

Steph yelled loudly as this problem was yet to be solved.

And – Miko turned around.

She appeared even more enchanting under the moonlight – and she spoke with a monster-like sinister smile:

“We won’t do anything. Just like that we get two races – isn’t it a good deal?”

Miko indicated that there was 「None」 of that sort of option, allowing Steph to finally understand everything.

Which is to say – she could summarize the incident.

(Neither Sora and the others or Miko-san planned to save anyone from the start -!)

Sora and Miko and the others had discussed – a single move that could put the two races in 「Checkmate」.

Just for this purpose, only for this purpose, they had actually so easily.

- Treated Ino as a sacrifice - !

“…That sort of thing… I don’t approve of it.”

“Huh?”

Golden – exactly like a 「Monster」, even though Miko’s beastly eyes were causing Steph’s knees to wobble.

But, even if so – Steph continued to survey her surroundings, squeezing out her voice with all her might.

In an Elchea without Sora and the others, the only Werebeast that had supported Steph was – Hatsuse Ino.

Although he had only been with them for two weeks, playing together and struggling to rebuild Elchea, he had spent a tremendous amount of effort on the establishment of the Elchean[29] Federation, without him, they might not even know where to begin.

No matter to the Eastern Federation or to Elchea – to Steph, he was definitely not a cheap talent, and if a sacrifice were to occur for the sake of uniting multiple races – it would cause unbelievably negative repercussions.

Miko couldn’t possibly fail to understand this unspoken rule –

“Hatsuse Ino is undoubtedly a man of great talent, a man who had supported me since the very beginning of the Eastern Federation, and a man who would undoubtedly reply 「I obey」 if he was given the order to die for it – this sort of man really cannot be considered worthless – but in the end he still remains an impeccable man that has achieved great things.”

Miko spoke regretfully while looking up at the moon.

For their own benefits, they could even sacrifice someone like that so easily -!

(Then I might be sacrificed at any time then – who could trust someone like that!!)

Within the emotionally charged Steph’s field of vision.

Izuna appeared, sitting slightly further away from them.

- Of course, Izuna couldn’t possibly come to terms with a situation like this.

With her own grandfather being sacrificed, even for the sake of Izuna, Miko still –

“I-Is Izuna -?”

- Fine with this? Before Steph could finish her sentence, Izuna began hugging her knees as though attempting to hold herself in, rendering her unable to continue.

Even though she couldn't see her properly in the dusk – she could still hear Izuna's voice.

"…Grandpa was prepared long ago, des…"

Far away from the bonfire, under the faint glow of the moon and stars, Izuna's expression couldn't be seen.

"…No matter it be Grandpa's heartbeat or smell, they are good sounds and good smells, des."

However, Izuna's voice.

It carried sounds of her crying as well – despite the pitch darkness, her emotions were sufficiently conveyed.

"I don't want Grandpa to die… but it'll be fine as long as Izuna bears it alone, so – s-so! More people… can be saved… de, des –"

Steph recalled a scene from the beach earlier.

After the ruckus at the seaside – when she was deciding whether to let Sora or Ino help with her fur.

Izuna who should have been sick of being fondled by Ino, instead – walked towards him without hesitation.

- She understood… it would be the last time.

Izuna had accepted this outcome from the start.

Werebeasts – they had supernatural senses, and they were done communicating by then.

Steph was the only one not in the know, but –

"- Still, don't you feel sad?"

"I'm not sad – I just… don't understand some things, des."

She clenched her teeth, appearing to exhale.

Izuna asked a question with a shaking voice.

"…Because Sora said – no one will die, no one will suffer, des! …B-but then, why – is Izuna suffering, des? Is Izuna weird, des…!?"

- Her tears fell like rain.

Even in the darkness, it was obvious from Izuna's voice that she was crying large tears.

However Steph – felt the blood that was concentrated in her head dissipate slowly.

Hatsuse Izuna – this child was too young.

Too obedient, too pure, too smart – too clever.

To make a girl like that, a girl merely eight years old take part in games she does not wish to, even causing her to feeling guilt towards pleasurable things, making her shoulder the burden of the lives on an entire continent. This truth made Steph realize:

- The Eastern Federation’s actions – didn’t start from here.

- Sacrificing the minority for the greater good – was normal for them.

“You created the Eastern Federation with such ways that make children cry like this, didn’t you – you’re despicable.”

- The Werebeasts had previously split into many small tribes and continued their disputes.

A method like this that united them within the short time of half a century and made the Eastern Federation a great power –

Steph suddenly felt that she had a small glimpse of the big picture, and she – even scolded Miko in an underestimating fashion.

Miko met her gaze head on, and replied:

“Sacrificing some for the greater good – it’s not even a necessary evil, but a 「Natural」 one. If you want to care about every single person – then every single person would express his/her opinion, how are you going to run a government like that… little wench.”

…Steph had no way to rebut that.

To be honest, Elchea’s nobles acted the same way.

They had tried their best to not let anyone suffer any losses, but completely equality was impossible in the end.

Steph clenched her fists, which was when Jibril began attacking her.

Maybe because she was unable to understand Steph’s opinion, her expression was that of genuine curiosity.

“Does Dora-chan have something to say? Just by sacrificing one person, we can save two dying species; and we might even move one step closer towards uniting with the Eastern Federation through strengthening Elchea’s forces – what else is there to be desired?”

- Steph still was unable to rebut them.

“Could it be –“ Jibril continued.

“You think that without sacrifice and unhappiness, we can conquer the world – no, taking a step back, we can reclaim Elchea?”

“…!”

“Or maybe you simply –“

Jibril continued with an even more provocative smile:

“You simply don’t want to hurt those close to you – how selfish of you ♥”

Steph clenched her teeth – she understood clearly.

Just by sacrificing one person, they could unite two races.

They could save two races that would go extinct if they did nothing.

If it was not good of her to feel bad for sacrificing Ino alone, then –

“- So what…!”

Steph spoke determinedly.

Looking at Izuna who was trembling in shock, she yelled – as though she was awakened.

“I don’t care what you call me, be it selfish or self-interested, but despite this, there’s only one thing I truly know! It’s that using this method to unite all the races – is impossible!”

- She had no concrete evidence.

Miko and Jibril’s words were very true, and what they spoke of sadly was the unquestionably more realistic thing to do.

But, Steph was confident that it 「Wasn’t the way」.

As for why – probably because – it was 「Common sense」.

The two of them made perfect sense, and it was a proper method of attacking head-on.

- But, getting down to it.

Attempting to unite all the races by attacking head-on – would probably be an impossible feat –

Part 4

Sora and Shiro returned calmly after wiping their hands.

What they were met with was Miko who was returning home and a solemn atmosphere.

And – Steph's gaze pierced them like a needle.

"Ah… what's up with this atmosphere?"

"Essentially speaking you choose to run away right?"

"- What?"

"I get it, you want to sacrifice Ino-san alone to get two races – that's just a 「Threat」… I've overestimated you! How do you still have the guts to say you want to unite all the races after you've used this sort of method!!"

Faced with Steph's harsh words and expression, Sora scratched his head and looked at Shiro in confusion instead.

"Eh, um, Shiro, why am I being scolded?"

"…Because…you took too long…?"

"Of course I didn't take long, I just went to take a piss!! F-forget it, I don't really understand but my bladder's empty now."

- With a grunt, he cleared his throat, and Sora said "Let's get back to the original topic." –

"So let's start over – to awaken the Empress, let's get moving."

…- Huh?

Everyone was speechless, while Sora continued calmly:

"Without Plum's magic, as long as we actually awaken the Empress the Dhampirs and Seirens won't go extinct; and we can use that as a condition for them to release Ino as well, which would resolve the entire situation – speaking of which we only 「Interrupted」 the game, 「Giving up」 is against my personal policy, so we're going to try again –"

Ignoring the stunned masses, Sora stroked his chin and spoke:

"The problem is 「How do we awaken her」."

Sora looked sharply at Plum:

“I can just about guess – no one knows the condition… right?”

“…Y-yeah…”

“Huh? You said no one knows… how is that?”

Steph peeked at Izuna.

Izuna who was crying since earlier looked up attentively, seemingly transfixed by Sora’s words.

She closely observed Plum’s reactions – then she nodded her head, indicating she wasn’t lying.

However Sora nodded, as though he had expected that.

“The Seirens can’t use magic while the Dhampirs can – if anyone knew the plan would’ve failed a long while ago, and Amira only knows -「It’s not a game to make the Empress fall in love」.”

“…How can you be sure?” Steph asked.

“The Empress went into hibernation before she became the Empress… but in her standpoint she would become an Empress sooner or later… if someone like that said she would give all her rights to you… what would you do?”

Plum sighed and spoke, originally thinking that she had found the real condition.

Sora and Shiro nodded and continued:

“If such a dangerous truth were to be mentioned with someone like Amira in the vicinity, she would definitely conceal it – and what is the ultimate method of doing so?”

“…If no one knows the truth…then…no one will find out…”

- Exactly, which is to say.

To beat the Empress’ game…

One had to find the victory condition that no one knew except for the Empress herself.

It was – a game called 「Victory Condition」.

It would be nearly impossible to beat, and could be described as extremely difficult.

But –

“As long as it isn’t a 「Realistic Romance Game」-「Kuuhaku」won’t lose!”

"…Mm…!"

The two of them powerfully – uttered their maxim that was both reliable and embarrassing.

But upon seeing the siblings' actions – Steph asked nervously:

"…A-about that… Sora, didn't you – wanted to sacrifice Ino-san?"

"Huh~? What are you talking about, you're such a Steph."

Hearing Sora's words, they carried an unmistakable 「Denial」.

She didn't care even though her own name was being used as an insult.

"I can't possibly let a living cultural artifact like Izuna get depressed, and Ino – that real man among men, how could I leave him… Steph, it's not possible to not get tired, but you need to wake up before you start sleeptalking nonsense like this!"

…Sora spoke as though Ino's value to him had risen multiple folds like a profitable company in the stock market, and he didn't seem as though he was faking it.

"Also – I said I would come back, didn't I? Amira can't lay a hand on Ino since he's the only way they can get us to rejoin the game, and if they do they can only become 「Slaves」."

Steph spoke once more:

"B-but about Ino-san, Miko-san said 「We won't do anything」-"

"Of course, Miko-san let us use Ino as 「Proof」, while the rest is our job."

Hearing Sora's crisp and blunt response, Steph's eyes grew even wider.

Yes, Miko – didn't need to do anything.

Because after this – Sora and the others 「Wanted everything」.

"Miko-san continuously used an ability 「Blood Devastation」 that might cost her life, even offering an important subordinate of hers to us – now it's our turn to do our best – exactly what it sounds like, we need to put our lives on the line."

Sora announced cheerfully, while Shiro nodded in agreement.

However – the process of undergoing a chilling revelation and their next words caused Steph to inhale sharply.

"That's called -「Working together」 right?"

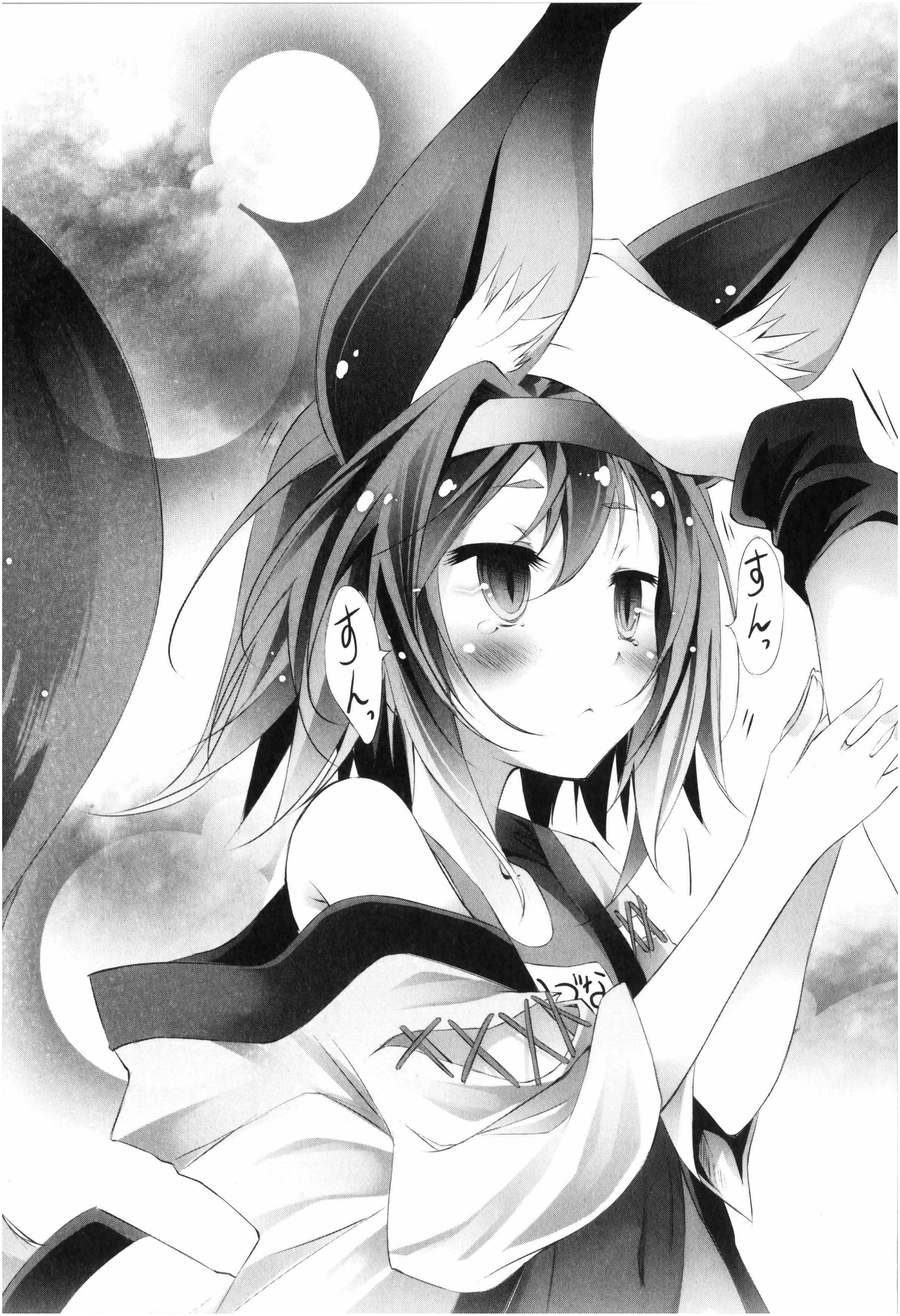
A small shadow passed by Steph.

Izuna looked up with her eyes red and swollen at Sora and Shiro somewhat uneasily.

“You all are planning to save Grandpa, des?”

Sora and Shiro didn’t know why she was crying.

But – Sora placed his hand on Izuna’s head, fondling it somewhat forcefully, then spoke with a laugh: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"But of course, I'll definitely get the old man back – I'll make a 「Promise」 with you."

The uneasy gaze shifted towards Shiro – and what welcomed it was 「Confirmation」.

"…Izuna-tan…believe in Nii…"

It was unavoidable that Izuna didn't know.

It was… something only Shiro knew.

When Nii – Sora – said the word 「Promise」.

Even the 「Ten Pledges」 falter under the might of it – for that word meant an absolute oath.

But –

"…Nii absolutely…won't go back on it…"

Hearing Shiro's confirmation, Izuna looked up at her once again.

The hand that was caressing her head – Izuna smelled it.

And then – she wiped her wet eyes and spoke:

"…Mm, I believe you, des."

"Alright, someone believes me, des."

Sora spoke jokingly, while Steph looked on from a distance.

Jibril stood beside her.

"Sorry, Dora-chan, I went too far."

"…What?"

"I was curious as to how you would react, so I couldn't resist… but Dora-chan is right."

- Her expression looked like she was going to jut out her tongue, as the overly curious person spoke.

And as Steph glared at her, Jibril continued solemnly:

"The Masters will undoubtedly change this world."

But the method – Jibril continued:

"Because no currently known methods will allow it."

“…”

- So regarding the true way to awaken the Empress –

Steph was only half listening to Sora’s next words.

…At that time, hearing Miko and Jibril’s words – she felt something 「Wasn’t right」.

As she was searching for the reason why she felt that way – she finally realized why as she looked at the two figures standing before her.

Sora... Shiro… the two of them…

They wouldn’t use any legitimate methods.

They snorted and laughed at things like 「Reason」.

They sliced away and ignored things like 「Common sense」.

The two had said – they wanted to rule over all the races without any deaths nor bloodshed.

It was like a dream – a completely unrealistic goal, impossible to achieve through reason and common sense.

- But their shadows told people that they 「Could do it」.

On that day – on the day of their coronation – Steph might have seen it.

She might have seen the same thing Jibril who was standing beside her saw –

- As she began to understand the future she was predicting for this world, she began feeling emotional.

“Ah~ right, Steph, you said something that I can’t ignore.”

“Huh?”

Steph snapped out of her frozen stance upon hearing Sora’s words.

“Sacrificing Ino to get two races – firstly sacrificing Ino is wrong, and –“

She once again heard something that made her freeze.

“It’s not two races – it’s 「Three」♪”

…

…- Huh?

Epilogue - Interrupt End

Part 1

She felt voices conversing behind her by the beach.

Miko, who was walking alone in the darkness, looked up at the moon and began mumbling to herself.

“...Did he realize – I was testing him?”

No...Miko shook her head, denying her own words.

Even if he did find out, that man’s actions still wouldn’t change.

Sora from the start – never planned to sacrifice Ino at all.

The sounds of his heartbeat didn’t change at all from the beginning, and it sounded incredibly relaxed.

- Yes, Miko was testing Sora and the others.

If Miko was in that position, being forced to make the same decision, what would she have done?

It was very possible – no, it was unquestionable that she would choose to sacrifice Ino.

Because it was an unnecessary risk, and that just by one sacrifice they would acquire many benefits.

Because to ask for even more – would be 「Idealism」.

And to give up on her ideals -

- Was her limit.

“...Can we expect them?”

If it was those two, they would simply nonchalantly overcome their limits.

Just to confirm this – Miko who had used the decision to 「Save or sacrifice Ino」 to test them, closed her eyes.

Sora and Shiro – would they choose to 「Sacrifice him」 like she would...

She had stubbornly 「Tested」 Sora and Shiro, attempting to make them surpass limits that even she could not.

- To punish herself, to force her to live with extreme guilt for the rest of her life, she had intentionally chosen Hatsuse Ino (him) as the sacrifice, and -

“...Maybe we really can expect them.”

At this point, Miko finally realised.

The ruckus coming from behind her – Imanity, Werebeasts, Flügel and even Dhampirs.

- Sora and Shiro never had the concept of 「Racial Discrimination」.

“...If it’s them – maybe we can trust them with it.”

As she spoke, she clutched her chest.

Miko felt her own heartbeat – an emotion long forgotten.

She murmured to herself while looking up at the blood-red moon.

Part 2

“Jibril.”

“I’m here.”

Upon hearing Sora’s calls, Jibril immediately teleported behind him.

“You know how the Empress went into hibernation, and the conditions to awaken her, don’t you.”

When they met Plum, it was Jibril that had explained the situation to them.

“Yes – but that was false information...”

Thinking that she would be scolded again, Jibril’s voice softened slightly, but then Sora said:

“It’s not that, where did you get the information?”

“My hometown – Avant Heim.”

Sora continued half expectantly, half helplessly:

“...Anyway with the way you Flügel do things, you must have gathered all sorts of written resources from all over the world, right?”

“Yes, of course ♪ “

Jibril nodded proudly in confirmation.

Looking at her expression, Sora couldn’t help but smile bitterly in helplessness, thought to himself “Never mind” and continued pondering the situation at hand.

- To beat the Empress’ game.

Victory conditions that nobody knew and practically didn’t exist, and there were extremely limited ways to find them.

But – there were still ways.

They needed – information, and -

“Steph, please work together with Izuna to search for information in the late king’s books.”

“- Huh?”

“Regarding the continent Elchea originally possessed that bordered the Seirens’ seas.”

And then – Sora said:

“I don’t believe that the king that had exposed the Eastern Union’s game wouldn’t do any other research regarding neighboring nations.”

The man that had pretended to be a foolish king with noble aspirations – probably wouldn’t have a complete answer.

Because if he did, the Empress would’ve been awakened by now – but -

“...Even if there’s no answer, there could be observations that might lead us to them.”

Upon seeing Sora’s eyes that contained trust in the King, trust in her grandfather.

“Please, Steph.”

“- Alright, leave it to me.”

“...I understand, des.”

Izuna and Steph nodded in agreement at once.

“...Um, about that...w-what should we do...?”

“Ah yes, Jibril, Shiro and I.... and Plum, you come along as well.”

“Oh, a-alright... huh, where are we going?”

“Didn’t I say it earlier? - We intend on conquering three races, not two.”

Sora continued with a smile:

“Alright, here’s the problem, in order to find out about this game where the victory conditions aren’t clear, the only surefire way is to look for records of people that have taken part in the game previously, and deduce the victory conditions by comparing them – so where’s the only place we can go that probably has the most records?”

…

- A second’s pause, and then...

A whooshing sound was heard, and another one – but that was a sound carrying a completely opposite meaning.

“Finally – finally! A new Master to rule us Flügel are to sit on the throne – ah, to think that such a grand day would come so early!”

“Kyaaaaaaahhhhh please no! I don’t want to go to the lair of monsters like those!”

Jibril knelt on the ground and began to pray with a force that kicked up all the sand around her.

And the sounds of Plum struggling, yelling in an attempt to get away but was being restrained by Jibril.

Sora ignored the commotion, and grasped Shiro’s hand.

He nodded slightly.

“Alright, let’s go – we’re heading to 「Avant Heim」.”

Afterwords

Phew~ I'm really tired w. That's it for now! (TL note: Japanese people often add 'w' to the end of words. Kind of how we say 'lol' a lot.)

To be honest, it all started with my editor discussing with me to turn the episode preview I made originally as a joke to a reality.

Honestly, I never really thought about what I was going to write ←

But I couldn't turn down the editor's well wishes, so I decided to try it out anyway w.

So here are the messages to you readers from our editors -

Second-generation editor S: "Kamiya-sensei, please don't adopt such poor work attitudes any longer.

If it weren't for the fact that the author and illustrator is the same person, this novel might even be delayed for another month.

Also on online message boards, please limit yourself to about three lines." (TL note: The author's first few lines came from the Japanese message board 2ch, as one author there went overboard and got famous on the internet for being overly emotional.)

- I'm sorry, I'll work seriously from now on, and I'm Kamiya Yuu.

『NO GAME NO LIFE』 that was supposed to be published every five months or so – was delayed by one month. (TL note: Japanese publishing time.)

First, I deeply apologize for the delay.

"Sensei, please reflect on this deeply. Even deeper than the Marina Trench."

Also, one of the reasons for the delay is because the editors got my work progression completely wrong.

"I'm reflecting on this already, even deeper than the earth's mantle."

Alright, now regarding this time's 『NO GAME NO LIFE Volume 4』.

Just like what I had planned, I attempted to write a volume with a rather cheery, relaxing atmosphere.

Because I wanted to let up on the plot from the first to third volumes, and continue from there.

Also, to help the story progress for the following volumes, just a cheery, happy, relaxing volume -

...That was what I had planned, so how did it turn out like this?

“I had heard originally that this was going to have a cheery, relaxing plot, so why is the first draft over four hundred players long? I personally really want you to explain this mysterious scenario that seems straight out of the X-Files.”

...Yes, the truth about this entire affair is actually even deeper than the Gutenberg.” (TL note: A layer located between the earth’s mantle and core.)

Do you want to know?

“Even deeper than the earth’s mantle? Spit it out then.”

I’ll be honest.

Wasn’t it because some editor wanted to make this series into a manga with my wife?

Because of that, I ended up spending one week of each month on drawing manga instead – essentially returning to my roots as a manga artist.

“...Eh...about that...”

Also it was because I took up one of the series my previous editor S sent over.

Over here there isn’t much work since everyone cooperates on everything, but just as I was rushing to finish the volume up my typewriter broke, and as I was going to get a new one I was run over by a car that smashed my bones to bits, but luckily since I was short on cash my insurance helped my purse quite a bit so never mind.

“...Is that all?”

The problem is after that, because my lead editor completely messed up my work progression, wanting me to work on three volumes, and due to the process of dividing the workload being rather complicated, I was at my limit just writing half a volume.

So it became four hundred pages, but since it’s half a volume the structure of the story began to have problems, with the most worrying one being the story lacking a climax -

Thus, I began pondering and editing the structure of the story with regards to that.

So? Did this explanation reach the Guten-whatever?”

“It’s the Gutenberg, how should I put it, um – thank you for your hard work ♥ “

Yeah, the situation could be mostly attributed to 「Human error」, so please say a few words about this incident ♥

“To think that such devilish editors exist... what a horrifying working environment...”

Yes, to think that a devil could say such words with a straight face... how scary (trembling voice)

- Never mind, I won’t mention human error for now, but actually a lot of other things happened that I just didn’t write down.

Such as diabetes, I was scolded by my doctor, and got food poisoning just from going out to eat yakitori once.

- But just let me say this, all this isn’t made up.

“Kamiya-sensei, I suggest that you go for an exorcism!”

I already have!

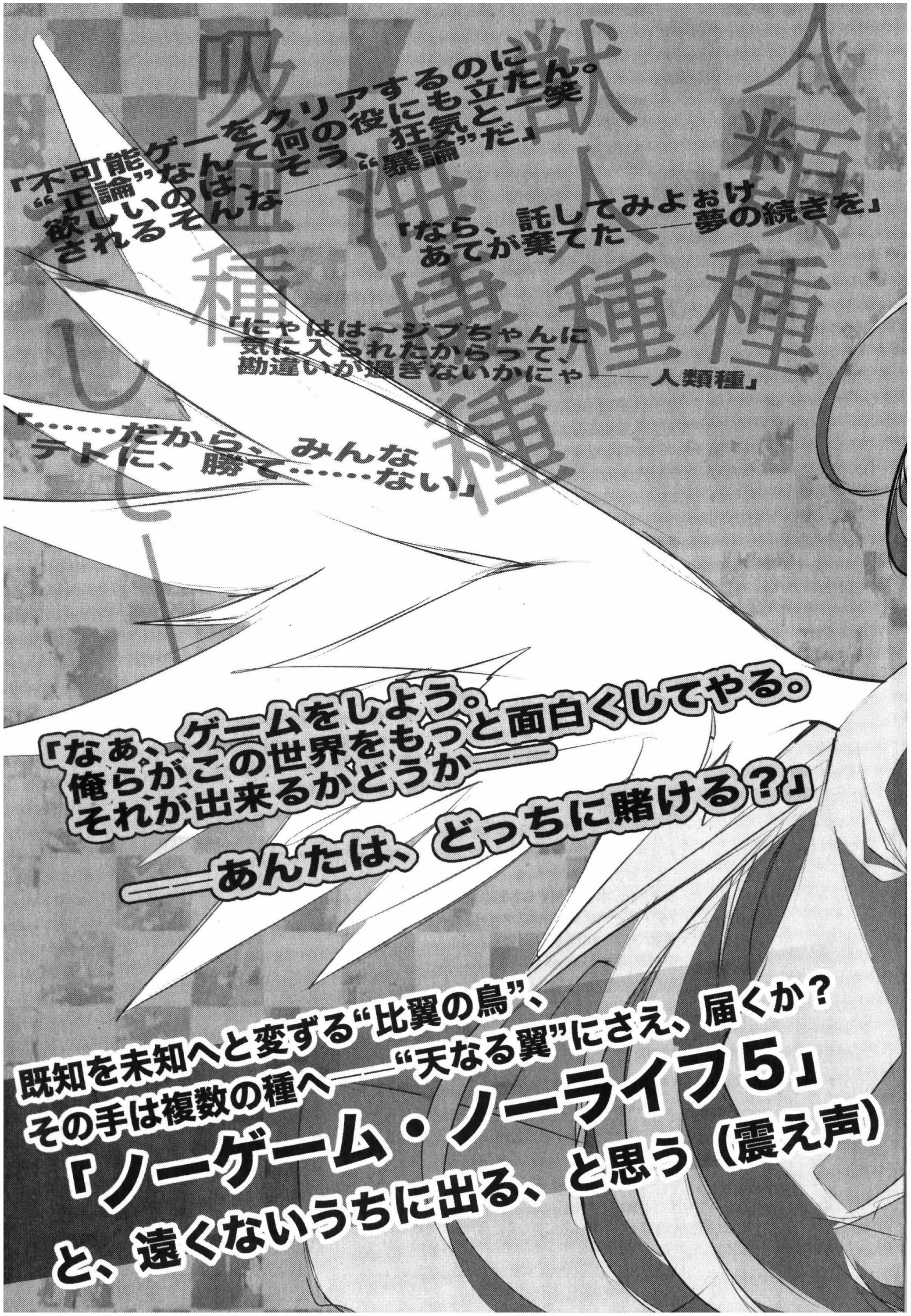
“...Huh?”

I went to Meiji Shrine before I got cancer.

I visited Fushimi Inari-Taisha after I got cancer.

This year I went to visit Kawashika Daishi. But all this still happened anyway.

たった一つの馬鹿げたゲーム―――
だがそこに交錯するは三つ四つの“思惑”



「不可能ゲーをクリアするのに
“正論”なんて何の役にも立たん。
欲しいのは、そう、狂気と一笑
されるそんな――“詭論”だ」

「なら、託してみよおけ
あてが棄てた――夢の続きを」

「にゃははは～ジブちゃんに
気に入られたからって、
勘違いが過ぎないかにゃ――人類種」

「……だから、みんな
テトに、勝て……ない」

「なぁ、ゲームをしよう。
俺らがこの世界をもっと面白くしてやる。
それが出来るかどうか―――

―――あんたは、どっちに賭ける？」

既知を未知へと変ずる“比翼の鳥”、
その手は複数の種へ――“天なる翼”にさえ、届くか？
「ノーゲーム・ノーライフ５」
と、遠くないうちに出る、と思う（震え声）

If I hadn’t been to visit all these places, I might even be on the other side of the Sanzu River by now. (TL note: All the places above are places significant to Japanese Buddhist beliefs. Sanzu River is a river that traditionally divides the border between life and death.)

Ah, but at the end of the year I went to check my bank book only to see that it had only the number 「0」 written on it, I don’t even have money to pay the ferryman across the river... what happens if I don’t pay him? Will I come back to life?

“No, I don’t think those sort of lifelines exist...”

Fine – just like that, I’ll stop here.

The content of this volume is relaxing, cheerful (with a deeper meaning).

But this is also approaching a sprint – the plot of this series entered its climax in the previous volume, so to surpass it! I will sprint forward even faster, so please support -

“Ah, Kamiya-sensei, Kamiya-sensei.”

Huh? Ah, I’m here, what is it? I’m just preparing to finish this up.

“The editor of Alive is here to rush you, is your storyboard draft completed yet?”

….........

“And the special volume and the script for a booklet of some project, and don’t forget – huh? Kamiya-sensei? Hey~ are you still there?”

References

1. ↑ In Japanese tradition, architectural spaces designed to be used for tea ceremony (chanoyu) gatherings are known as chashitsu (茶室, literally "tea rooms").
2. ↑ -kou (公) is a suffix generally used for lords at governmental occasions.
3. ↑ Four of a kind plus a joker (wild card).
4. ↑ To execute an extremely unsuspected or well-planned out trick that others do not know is upon them until it is too late.
5. ↑ In the original text, her body laid on the floor shaped like the kanji character, 大.
6. ↑ Translated as Miko's home in Volume 3, Chapter 4. 巫社, read as Mikoja, literally means Miko's Shrine, and is adapted from 神社 (jinja/Shinto shrine) which is where real Japanese mikos reside in.
7. ↑ A girl who has already reached adulthood (18 years old) but retains the looks of a loli.
8. ↑ A popular dating sim, see here
9. ↑ Over-Powered
10. ↑ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanten
11. ↑ TL note: Original reads 光精, fits with the anime translation. Spirits are basically Disboard chakra...? Edits welcome.
12. ↑ TL note: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thalassotherapy
13. ↑ TL note: Whoa! There goes gravity. Whoa! There goes Rabbit, he choked, OK this isn't funny.
14. ↑ TL note: Cthulhu are evil beings created by American writer H.P. Lovecraft in his Cthulhu Mythos. They signify 'water'. CL note: They look like mutant octopuses
15. ↑ TL note: Tokimeki Memorial is a popular Japanese dating simulator. Probably censored for fear of… copyright issues.
16. ↑ TL note: Time for some explanation. In the "Tokimeki Memorial" series of dating simulation games by Konami, there is a well-known cheat that sets all the player's stats to 573 if they change their names to Konamiman. Konami in Japanese is pronounced the same way as 573. However, this affects negative stats as well, like susceptibility to injuries, things like that. Since the game they're in is presumably based on it, this cheat should work as well.
17. ↑ TL note: In the popular light novel/manga/anime series "I Have Few Friends/Boku ha Tomodachi ga Sukunai", the character Mikazuki Yozora changes another character, Sena Kashiwazki's username in a dating simulator to Kashiwazaki Semoponume.
18. ↑ TL note: Yoshio Saotome is one of the characters in the very first edition of Tokimeki Memorial. His role is to provide the player with info on the girls, phone numbers, blood type, hobbies, etc.
19. ↑ TL note: Another character from the first edition of TokiMemo. Rei Ijuuin is at first introduced to the player as a guy but halfway through the game it is revealed that "he's" actually a girl. It's a trap!
20. ↑ TL note: Riajuu – Japanese word for someone that's living his/her real-world life to the fullest. Think this term was used way back in Volume 1 or 2.
21. ↑ TL note: TokiMemo 1st gen, of course.

22. ↑ Tokimeki Memorial Reference. School name derived from Tokimeki Memorial Online
23. ↑ TL note: Well, Katou Taka is a Japanese porn star. You don’t want to know what I had to go through to find that out.
24. ↑ TL note: Abdomen is an approximation. For the accurate term:"Gut" Gut http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dantian
25. ↑ TL note: Go-home club i.e. no clubs. Go home.
26. ↑ TL note: That was a line from one of the first-gen TokiMemo characters, Fujisaki Shiori.
27. ↑ TL note: Ah. Bombs. Hugest pain in the ass in this game i.e. TokiMemo. Essentially if the player knows multiple girls but only has high affections with some of them, the neglected ones will have “bomb” icons and will begin to spread bad rumors about the player, ruining the player’s relationships. This forces careful planning/dating.
28. ↑ TL note:烈立铁in Chinese, edits welcome.
29. ↑ TL note: Elchean?

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